

BIOLOGICAL 691

Chapter 691: Future Plans

Erik's gaze was distant, his mind still entwined with the perplexing Thaid he had seen on the screen, when an unexpected knock on his door hoicked him from his reverie.

"Who is it?"

"It's Kael," the voice on the other side said.

"Come in," Erik said, his tone welcoming. He shifted from his chair, moving to sit at his desk, his posture relaxed yet attentive.

Kael, with his dark complexion and distinctive prominent nose, entered the room, his short, well-groomed brown hair adding to his distinguished look.

His burly build and notably muscular arms spoke of strength, yet his thoughtful demeanor revealed a penchant for intellectual challenges.

As Kael stepped into Erik's room for the first time, he was struck by its stark simplicity. The room, belonging to a man of Erik's stature, was unexpectedly sparse.

A lone bed, a desk with a single chair, a basic bathroom, and a modest bedside table comprised the entire furnishings. The absence of personal touches or decorations was conspicuous, painting a picture of someone who either spent very little time in personal space or had little interest in it.

The bare walls, devoid of any photos or artwork, and the lack of any items that suggested hobbies or personal interests hinted at a deeper, unspoken melancholy.

The room felt more like a temporary shelter than a home, reflecting a sense of detachment or perhaps an underlying sadness in Erik. This minimalism suggested an inner turmoil or a profound distraction that left no room for the ordinary pleasures or comforts of life.

With a nod, he greeted Erik, his expression showing seriousness. "I came to discuss what we're going to do about what we found," he said, referring to the azure Thaid captured in the black box footage.

Erik gestured for Kael to take a seat. "I was just reviewing that video. For now, we keep this a secret."

Kael raised an eyebrow. "Why? That thing is undoubtedly beyond anything we can handle. Shouldn't we warn people?"

Erik shook his head. "I want to investigate this further before taking any final decision," he said, his hand brushing his chin in contemplation. "The video only shows part of the Thaid's strength. If I can kill it, I want to do it, but if it is too strong even for me, things must be done with more care." His eyes narrowed.

"Maybe collaborate with the Band of Giants," Erik suggested, but as he spoke, his gaze shifted away, betraying a sense of reluctance.

He was hesitating at his own suggestion, as if the very idea of collaboration sat uneasily with him. His facial expression tightened. Reaching out to the Band of Giants was not a course of action he favored.

There was a stiffness in his posture that emerged as he mentioned them, suggesting an internal resistance to the idea, as if he were considering all options but found this one unpalatable.

"Besides, there are other things going on that concern me more," he said, his gaze returning to Kael, showing a seriousness that underscored the weight of his words.

Kael leaned forward, his brow furrowed in concern. "What could be more concerning than the presence of that monster?" He trusted Erik's judgment. If Erik deemed something more pressing than this Thaid, the situation was indeed serious.

Erik held up a hand, signaling a need for discretion. "I can't discuss it right now, but trust me, there are a lot of things going on in the city that demand us to be prepared."

Kael paused. "All right," he said. "You're going to search for the monster by yourself? Are you sure that's wise?"

Erik leaned back in his chair, a calm, resolute expression on his face. He met Kael's worried gaze with a steady look. "There's no one else in the city able to handle this besides me. You know that as well as I do." His voice was even, exuding a quiet confidence.

Kael sighed, his expression turning serious. "I do, but Erik, judging by what we've seen, this is far more dangerous than it appears. We checked it ourself. This Thaid doesn't appear on any databases, not even those on the dark net. We don't know what it can do."

Erik nodded. "I'm aware of the risks, Kael. But the fact remains that there's no alternative and I need the guild to focus on growing right now. I will do it while you, Noah and the others manage the guild."

Kael observed Erik's expression. One of the rare individuals permitted seeing him unmasked. He scrutinized Erik's features, looking for any trace of doubt or uncertainty in his decision. Seeing no such signs, Kael spoke.

"Alright, if that's your decision. Just remember, there's no financial gain in this, and you're exposing yourself to danger," Kael said, his voice tinged with concern as he leaned forward.

Erik responded, his expression resolute. "I understand," he said. "But I've been considering a trip soon. This situation simply adds another purpose to it."

Kael gave a slow nod. "Alright then," he said.

As Kael rose to leave, Erik's voice halted him. "Before you go, there's something else. I'm planning on establishing some shifts for the guild members. We need to improve our members' level of strength, and I want people to focus on increasing their neural links. They won't be able to take quests every day."

Kael paused, digesting the information. His expression shifted to one of contemplation. "That's a smart move. The stronger each member is individually, the more powerful our guild becomes. I'll pass the word along," he said.

"Excellent." There was a hint of satisfaction in Erik's voice. "Make sure everyone understands the importance of this. We're entering uncertain times and must be prepared for whatever comes our way."

Kael observed Erik. "You seem damn sure about this."

"I am."

Kael gave a last nod, his face showing resolve. "Understood, Erik. I'll make sure everyone gets the message."

Once their conversation had concluded, Kael exited the room, shutting the door with a soft click that resonated in the stillness of Erik's space. He found himself left alone in the room, so he reclined in his chair, allowing his mind to drift back to the enigmatic Azure Thaid.

However, amid all this intrigue, Erik realized he needed to shift his attention towards more pressing matters. There were responsibilities that demanded his attention, and these responsibilities were both pressing and unavoidable.

Lost in deep contemplation, he remained seated with his gaze fixed on some distant point, pondering the countless challenges and unknowns that the future held.

The first item on his agenda was to expand his business operations. Erik had a vision of a guild that could sustain itself, generating its own weapons, armor, and vehicles.

Although it would lead to an increase in the overall expenses, they could offset it by selling their merchandise and earning a profit. Everything seemed fine, except for the fact that he was expected to pay an initial lump sum to get things started.

In order to accomplish this goal, he had to bring together a group of highly skilled individuals, including designers who would create the blueprints, blacksmiths who would forge the weapons, engineers who would construct the machinery, and mechanics who would ensure their upkeep. He had already come up with a few names he had in mind.

Erik's strategic planning encompassed more than just recruitment. His goal was to enhance the abilities of his guild members, making them faster, stronger, and more resilient warriors.

The more he thought about it, the more he realized the tremendous potential the system held in perfecting and enhancing the technique used in Liberty Watch Village.

If he were able to improve the technique for creating neural links, his team members would be able to establish these connections at a faster rate.

However, his intention was to maintain exclusivity over his superior technique, which was both faster and more efficient than any other.

By implementing this strategy, his guild members' strength would be fortified, which would distinguish them from others and guarantee their safety. This would cause the guild's prestige being elevated, which would in turn attract a wider range of talented individuals.

However, his mind was preoccupied with another ambitious project, which involved the development of a potion that could replicate the effects of expensive brain and body stimulating serums, but at a more affordable price.

Erik realized that in order to succeed in this endeavor, the system would have to conduct a thorough exploration of both alchemy and biochemistry. However, the potential benefits of giving his guild an edge in both physical and mental conditioning were too important to overlook.

Erik also realized the need for healing potions and other vital consumables. Given the nature of their operations, injuries were unavoidable.

In situations where healers were not available, having a consistent and reliable source of effective healing potions was going to be absolutely crucial.

With the intention of making things more convenient, he had the idea of setting up an alchemy lab, expecting its production would not only be beneficial for the guild, but also have the potential for successful sales in the market.

However, before diving into these ambitious plans, there was a pressing matter that needed immediate attention — a discussion with his clones. The execution of his strategies hinged on their vital participation, and their collaboration would help to initiate the actualization of his guild's future vision.

Chapter 692: Orders Issued

Retrieving his phone from the desk, Erik navigated through his contact list, seeking Noah and the other clones he had. Having started a group call, he wasted no time in giving them a brief and direct command to convene in his office right away.

As the call ended, Erik stood up from his seat and made his way to the office, which accommodated multiple people at the same time.

It was ten minutes later when the office door finally swung open. Noah was the first one to enter, and he was followed by the rest of the clones. Every single clone was dressed in complete military fighting gear, with their identities hidden behind masks.

Long coats, complete with hoods, were worn by the clones over their combat attire, heightening their already imposing presence and create an aura of mystery.

"Thank you for having come here so quickly," Erik said, gesturing for them to sit around the large oak table that dominated the center of the room. "I've called you all here for a matter of great importance."

The clones took their seats; they took off their masks. The others in the group had already assimilated human blood and gained the ability to shape-shift, whereas Noah remained the sole member who still appeared alien.

Their eyes met Erik's. They were prepared for the task at hand, yet maintained a sense of reverence. Since they were direct extensions of him, they couldn't possibly disregard the summons when their creator called for them.

Erik, feeling at ease, settled into the plush leather chair positioned behind his spacious office desk, absentmindedly tapping his fingers with a gentle rhythm on the impeccably polished surface.

"Before we get into the new business," Erik said, "I wanted to ask you if you completed the tasks I set out for you before I left on the quest."

Noah, stepping forward with the confidence of someone accustomed to leadership, began, "Yes, we've made significant progress." He paused, ensuring he had Erik's full attention. "As you requested, we've increased the number of mercenaries and workers in the guild, bringing our total count to 300." He gestured, emphasizing the expansion.

Leaning in closer, Erik raised an eyebrow, showing to Noah that he wanted more information.

Noah, catching the cue, said, "In addition to personnel, we've enhanced our arsenal with new vehicles, weapons, and armor to bolster our capabilities."

Erik, keeping his posture, said, "Go on."

With a small nod, Noah said, "We've also hired specialized personnel." He paused, choosing his words carefully. "Healers, to be precise, as per your request. But gaining their services came at a high cost." He listed their names. "They are Quenton Fenn, Wyla Gale, and Faris Cloud, who have already set up in the medical area."

Erik, absorbing this information, nodded, acknowledging the update. His gaze remained steady on Noah as he inquired, "Excellent. And the financials? How much did we spend on these upgrades?"

Noah paused, gathering the financial details in his mind before responding. "All told, the expenditures came to around 3 million Eurems, covering everything from provisions and ammunition to Intrity weights and the like."

Erik, upon hearing the figure, took a measured breath and exhaled. The number was hefty, yet he recognized its necessity for the guild's enhancement. "Very well," he said with a nod. "The reason I called you is that I have new orders."

"What I'm about to propose will require even more from our funds. However, if we do this right, the returns will far exceed the investment," Erik said.

At this, the clones moved closer, their focus sharpening. They were well-versed in Erik's approach to investments and the potential scale of his plans.

Erik, noting their engagement, continued. "I want to expand our operations further."

This statement caused Noah to straighten, his eyebrow lifting in a silent query.

"Expand how, exactly?" Noah asked, his interest piqued.

Erik leaned forward, his hands clasped together on the table as he unfolded his idea. "First, I want us to be self-sufficient. We're going to produce our own weapons, armor, and vehicles." He paused, allowing his words to settle. "I want you to recruit designers, blacksmiths, engineers, alchemists, and mechanics."

As he spoke, the clones exchanged quick glances, their postures adjusting into more comfortable positions.

Erik, noting their reaction, continued without hesitation. "But that's not all." He gestured for emphasis. "I also want to enhance our guild members' abilities. I'm going to ask the system to develop an improved version of Liberty Watch's training technique, aiming to expedite the formation of neural links in our members."

He paused, then said, "I also plan to create our line of potions, offering a cost-effective alternative to the Brain and Body Stimulating Serums. They might not match those in efficiency but will be more affordable, and we could also sell them."

Noah straightened in his seat, his gaze fixed on Erik as he processed the scope of the initiative. "That's a substantial undertaking. Can the system handle all of this? And what exactly do you need from us?"

Erik's eyes moved from one clone to another. "The system can do this, of course, as you all are well aware." He leaned back.

"What I need from you is to manage different aspects of this expansion. The roles will be the same, Noah. You'll coordinate the efforts and keep me informed." He then addressed the other clones.

"The rest of you will be responsible for production, research, and logistics. Our budget is 20 million eurems for equipment, recipes, blueprints, and talent acquisition. I want the best of the best." Erik paused, allowing the clones to think about how to start.

"We'll have weekly updates and problem-solving sessions. I expect the major parts of this plan to be in motion within a month, as I plan to leave the city soon after."

The clones, each with a nod, acknowledged their new roles. They were extensions of Erik, after all, sharing his vision and determination.

Erik, shifting in his chair to emphasize his next point, said, "And one more thing." His voice took on a note of gravity. "This information is sensitive. Until we're ready to go public, it stays within this room. Understood?"

In response, the clones replied, "Understood." Their posture changed, each adopting a more resolved stance, indicative of their readiness to shoulder the mission's responsibility.

Satisfied with their response, Erik reclined in his chair. "Good. We have a lot of work ahead of us, but I have no doubt we'll succeed." He paused, scanning the room. "Dismissed."

The sight of the door closing behind his departing clones evoked a bittersweet feeling within Erik, who now found himself in the solitude of his office, surrounded by a profound stillness.

The air in the room was cool, thanks to the soft hum of the air conditioning, which acted as a gentle reminder of the newfound comforts he now had at his disposal.

Getting up from his seat, he made his way towards a small refrigerator in one corner of the room. As he opened it, he reached inside and took out a bottle of refreshing fruit juice before pouring himself a glass.

Upon taking a sip, he couldn't help but contemplate the remarkable journey he had undertaken. A mere two years ago, his financial situation was so dire that he struggled to make ends meet and could afford essential items, let alone indulge in luxuries such as fruit juice.

It was a simple thing, really—just a blend of fruits in liquid form. It signified something of greater significance: a life that had progressed beyond mere survival and now had space for decision-making and little joys.

Making sure not to spill a drop, he moved the glass from its original location to a lavish couch that was situated against one of the walls in the office. As he sat down, a sigh of contentment escaped from him.

A small but significant reward for the obstacles he had encountered and the burdens he still bore. The cold and refreshing juice provided a much-needed respite.

Erik, with utmost care, positioned the glass on a table that was situated nearby before he settled back into the plush cushions.

Filled with a constant whirlpool of plans, strategies, and calculations, his mind was always in motion and never stopped working. But not today.

Today, he resolved in his mind that the course of action would take a different direction. Today, he would allow himself the luxury of rest.

In a serene moment, he closed his eyes, allowing himself to be embraced by the tranquility of the room. After what seemed like an eternity, Erik gave himself the rare opportunity to savor the present moment, finding solace in the calmness that accompanies achieving success through hard work.

And as he sat there, savoring the simple joy of a glass of fruit juice, he felt happy, if only for a moment.

"System. Show me the status."

[OBJ]

[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 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: Cō3D-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 Leylarhad's head whose only aim is to bite at whatever target the host is aiming. Its teeth have a poisonous element whose toxicity depends on the mana used. Notice: the target must be close to the projection.)

FORCE MANIPULATION: 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 693: Some Names

Seated at his desk, Erik meticulously went through a stack of paperwork while casually nibbling on a piece of toast.

The office was imbued with the scent of freshly brewed coffee, a comforting aroma that made the administrative work more manageable.

While in the act of raising his coffee cup to his mouth for another sip, an unexpected knock at the door caused him to pause.

"Come in," Erik called out, setting his coffee mug down.

As the door swung open, Noah and Nick entered, each of them holding folders that were filled to the brim with important documents.

After settling themselves in the seats situated across from Erik's desk, they briefly exchanged pleasantries before diving into the business at hand.

"So, Noah, Nick, what really brings you here so early?" Erik asked, leaning back in his chair.

Noah was the first to speak. "Master, we've been scouting locations for the production facilities you mentioned. We've identified a few potential sites, but we have a question: Do you want all the facilities to be in the same building, or would you prefer separate locations?"

Erik paused, considering the question. "Separate locations," he said. "Each facility should be specialized, but self-sufficient. From equipment to personnel, I want them to have everything they might need to operate independently."

Nick nodded, jotting down notes. "That makes sense. It would also reduce the risk; if one facility faces an issue, the others can continue to operate."

"Exactly," Erik said. "And it would be easier to expand in the future if each facility is its own entity."

Noah flipped open the folder he was holding. "In that case, we'll proceed with securing different locations. We've already identified some that are strategically placed, close to resources, and easily accessible for our personnel."

"Good," Erik said, pleased with the progress. "Make sure each facility has state-of-the-art security measures. We can't afford any breaches or thefts."

"Understood, Master," Noah assured him.

Then Nick chimed in, "Master Erik, if I may add something about the hiring process. I've been working on that front as well. Aside from some promising candidates for the general workforce, I've identified potential heads for each department."

Erik looked up, intrigued. "Go on."

Nick proceeded with his briefing, his hands gesturing to emphasize his points. "For Blacksmithing, we have Tyree Collin," he said. "He was the department head at Haven Market and came highly recommended."

He paused, his hands coming together in a steeple as he leaned forward, underscoring Tyree's reputation. "Tyree is known for his meticulous attention to detail. He's the kind of person who would spend hours perfecting a single blade."

Nick then straightened up, his hands separating and moving outward in a gesture of balance. "However, he's a bit of a perfectionist, which can sometimes slow down production." It was clear in his words many people often complained about this aspect of Tyree's personality.

Concluding his point, Nick brought looked Erik in the eyes. "But the quality of his work is unparalleled." Nick knew that despite any delays, the results would be worth the wait.

Erik nodded, making a mental note. "Quality is crucial. So, it is not like I see this as a negative quality. However, it's clear I can make my mind up only once I see how disruptive his behavior is. What about Alchemy?"

"For Alchemy, there's Jabir Sables," Nick said, rifling through the pages of his notes. He glanced up, then said, "He's a somewhat eccentric, to be honest." Nick shrugged his shoulders as he spoke. His hands made a small swirling motion, mimicking the act of mixing potions. "He loves experimenting and often gets lost in his world of potions and elixirs."

"But that's also his strength; he's incredibly innovative. He is one of those alchemists who isn't afraid to push boundaries and try new combinations, which could be beneficial for us." Nick nodded, tapping his finger on the table as he emphasized Jabir's potential value.

Erik smiled. "Innovation is always welcome. And the last one?"

Nick looked up, "For Vehicle Production, we have Darius Funnell. He's a no-nonsense, results-driven individual." He said, handing a report about the man to Erik for him to read. "Darius is known for his strict adherence to deadlines and efficiency. He maintains strict control, but he is also reputed for his inflexibility."

He's not one for improvisation and likes things planned and executed to the letter."

Erik leaned back in his chair, absorbing the information. "Efficiency is good, but flexibility is also important. We'll have to think about this, but for the other two, I have no problem."

Nick nodded, "Absolutely, Master Erik. I thought it would be good to meet them personally and gauge their fit for our guild."

Erik was impressed. "You've done excellent work, Nick. It's good to know that while I'm occupied with various responsibilities, things are being handled well here."

Nick bowed slightly. "Thank you, Master Erik. We aim to serve you to the best of our abilities."

Erik felt a sense of assurance swell within him. "Arrange for interviews with these candidates as soon as possible. I'd like to meet them and assess if they align with our guild's vision."

Nick looked up at Erik. "Master, would you like me to arrange individual meetings with these candidates, or would you prefer a group setting?"

Erik pondered before responding, "I'd like to meet all of them at the same time. Arrange for a lunch meeting here at the guild headquarters. It will give us an informal setting to gauge their personalities and how they interact with each other."

Nick nodded, making a note on his tablet. "A group lunch meeting it is. I'll coordinate the schedules and make sure everything is set up."

Erik said, "Make it as soon as possible. I want to move fast with this."

"Understood, Master," Nick said. "I'll get on it right away."

Erik glanced at Noah, who had been quietly observing the conversation. "Noah, assist Nick in coordinating this. Ensure the dining hall is prepared, and the meeting goes smoothly."

Noah nodded, "Of course, Master. I'll make sure everything is in order."

Nick turned to Noah, "Great, your help will make the process more efficient. We'll get started on this as soon as possible."

"Excellent," Erik said, satisfied. "I appreciate your efficiency and attention to detail. This is an important step for our guild, and I want to ensure we bring in the right people."

"As for the peculiarities you mentioned," Erik said, "they make people unique and bring different strengths to the table. We can use that diversity to our advantage."

"Of course, Master," Noah and Nick said in unison. "We'll make sure everything is arranged to your satisfaction, Master," Nick assured him.

"Good," Erik said, "You're dismissed. I look forward to meeting our potential new department heads."

As Nick and Noah left the office, Erik felt a sense of anticipation. This meeting could be a pivotal moment for the guild, setting the course for its future growth and success.

However, he still had many things to do, and couldn't think about this at that moment. What Erik had been up to during the morning was investigating about the Blackguards. He was trying to learn everything he could about them, but that wasn't simple.

The Blackguard organization first appeared in 2935, ostensibly to put an end to the Criminal Phase. This era was notorious for widespread chaos, as individuals misused their powers for personal gain, leading to rampant robbery, murder, and abductions. It was in this environment that criminal syndicates, such as the Crystal Cross Gang, began to emerge and gain notoriety.

To the general populace, the Blackguard represented a united force against the escalating menace of supercriminals and the dangers posed by thaids.

They were perceived as a collective police entity, supported by nations worldwide, dedicated to mitigating global threats. Erik, too, shared this belief until recent revelations cast doubt on their true nature.

However, the reality of their operations, exemplified by their actions in Doran's lab, painted a different picture. Alongside these revelations, intriguing historical details surfaced.

Notably, before the advent of the Blackguard, there was a clandestine group known as the Echoes, who were also engaged in battling supercriminals. This group, shrouded in mystery, contributed a lot to the complex tapestry of that tumultuous period.

The enigmatic leader of the Echoes, known only as 'The Wraith,' commanded a group shrouded in secrecy. Their legacy in history stemmed from two significant achievements.

The first was the Liberation of Zegan's Undercity.

Zegan, once a city considered the bastion of humanity, fell under the tyrannical rule of a supercriminal named Iron-fist, whose reign was marked by unspeakable atrocities. The Echoes mounted a daring operation against him.

One night, they infiltrated Iron-fist's headquarters by breaching its security systems. This paved the way for an assault team to storm the stronghold, leading to an intense battle. Using their powers, the Echoes successfully defeated Iron-fist's enforcers.

Their second notable triumph was the Silent Night coup, targeting Elena Dravic, a high-ranking Zegan government official. Dravic had been abusing her A-ranked brain crystal power, manipulating key government figures to serve her own interests, creating an extensive network of corruption and abuse of power.

The Echoes' decisive action brought an end to her manipulative reign, further cementing their place in history.

Erik found it peculiar that the disappearance of the Echoes coincided with the rise of the Blackguards, who seemed to undertake similar missions. Regardless, originally, the Blackguard's goal might have been to instill order worldwide. Maybe, originally, their purpose was really to set order inside the world, but things changed, even if they remained hidden.

Erik saw first hand their dubious connections to criminality and their willingness to fund scientific endeavors that teetered on the brink of madness. Their lack of hesitation to experiment on humans was something he had witnessed himself, deeply changing the opinion he had about them.

Erik's current puzzle involved unraveling the connection between the Blackguards and the Crystal Cross Gang. The gang operated under the umbrella of the Blackguards, but the question of leadership remained.

While Howell was widely recognized as the head of the Crystal Cross Gang, whispers in the criminal underworld suggested a more shadowy figure: Shade, rumored to be the true power behind the entire underworld's operations.

Given the Crystal Cross Gang's extensive influence in Frant and its widespread branches in various countries, Erik considered it plausible that Shade also exercised control over them. That wasn't just a rumor.

Erik also speculated on a potential link between Shade and his Uncle Benjamin, suggesting that the military might serve as a bridge connecting Shade to the Blackguards.

The possibility of Shade having control over the Crystal Cross Gang could clarify his presence in Etrium for a meeting with Doran.

Erik surmised the Blackguards might have financed Doran's research, with the Crystal Cross Gang playing a crucial role as an intermediary.

This arrangement likely involved abducting individuals and eliminating Thaid's, bringing everything to Doran to facilitate his experiments, all under the watchful eye of Uncle Benjamin.

While Erik acknowledged these were mere conjectures, they were the most plausible explanations he could derive from the limited information at his disposal.

Most of what he found were simple information about the Blackguards' history and some major achievements. There was nothing more.

The Crystal Cross Gang, the Blackguards, and even Uncle Benjamin were adept at concealing their activities.

There seemed to be no digital footprint or online records that Erik could use to corroborate his theories.

His only recourse to uncover the truth lay in venturing to their main headquarters in Frant and Hin, a risky endeavor that might unveil the clandestine workings of these secretive organizations.

"I really need to get stronger if I want to understand what is happening..."

Chapter 694: Jabir, Darius and Tyree (1)

Nick's face lit up with a pleased grin as he spoke into the phone. "Master, I've arranged the lunch meeting with Tyree Collin, Jabir Sables, and Darius Funnell. They've all accepted the invitation and are eager to meet you."

Erik, seated at his desk, leaned slightly forward, his expression one of approval. "Great job, Nick. Thank you for having handled it so quickly."

Nick's eyes gleamed with a sense of accomplishment. "I'm always here to assist, Master." The call then ended.

Erik redirected his attention towards the sleek computer resting on his desk. He was particularly interested in the evolving geopolitical landscape, particularly Frant's recent actions.

He launched a trusted news portal, eager to gather the latest insights. Among the countless headlines on the homepage, one news item stood out: the imminent danger of the Heniate.

The reports clarified every nation was keenly aware of Frant's current precarious position, which had been weakened by recent events.

The Heniate had not been defeated yet and still maintained control over a vast army of Thaid.

As Erik scrolled through the articles, his attention was captured by a striking headline: "Frant Halts Invasion of Hin, Establishes Massive Coastal Defense Line." The strategic shift suggested a significant change in Frant's military tactics.

By clicking on the headline, he explored the article in order to perform an in-depth analysis. The report explained in details Frant's abrupt halt in its aggressive incursion into Hin territory, a development that caught many military analysts off guard.

Instead of carrying out the invasion, Frant reallocated its resources towards strengthening its coastal defenses.

They constructed a series of fortifications to deter any potential assaults from the sea. The defense line was said to be staggering in its scale, featuring a series of watchtowers, blockades of various nature, and heavy artillery.

The article emphasized the strategic implications of this action, speculating on the potential reasons behind it. This was speculated to result from the Heniate's and Parasite's situation, according to the article.

The attacks took place in New Alexandria; however, because of the Heniate's survival, they also conducted investigations in other cities. In other locations near New Alexandria, there were a few minor instances of infection; however, they managed the situation.

It was speculated that the decision could be a response to the increasing Thaid threat or a strategic move to strengthen Frant's defenses following its recent setbacks. Or maybe because the nation couldn't afford anymore the war.

In addition, the piece incorporated expert viewpoints, with some regarding the action as a prudent defensive tactic, while others interpreted it as a sign of Frant's declining offensive prowess. Erik assimilated the information, contemplating its implications.

He knew that the significant change in military strategy could have profound implications, not only for Frant and Hin, but also for the wider geopolitical landscape. Attacking both nations now was a possibility.

The realignment of forces and the prioritization of coastal defense showed that Frant was preparing for a problem, one that had the potential to alter the regional power dynamics.

However, a noteworthy development emerged - the article referred to the Frantian leader as Sinisa Volkov, not Becker.

<Has Becker been demoted? >

He was not unhappy. Erik did not have a favorable opinion of the man, who evidently pursued a distinct approach to governing the country. It appeared his cautiousness had decreased.

Erik reclined in his seat, assimilating the information. This represented a notable progress, one that could have far-reaching implications for the stability of the region and his own future endeavors.

Erik, feeling the gravity of the evolving geopolitical landscape and the significance of his lunch meeting, closed his laptop. The day was unfolding with important decisions and discoveries, and he needed to be prepared for what lay ahead.

The sun was high in the sky when three limousines pulled up to the front of the guild headquarters. Each vehicle, with its sleek exterior, embodied a unique make and model, symbolizing the distinct personalities of the men they transported.

Tyree Collin, Jabir Sables, and Darius Funnell stepped out as the doors opened.

Tyree, the one Erik wanted to make the head of the Blacksmithing department, was the first to appear.

He possessed a robust physique, complemented by a thick beard, and was attired in a well-fitted suit that scarcely concealed his muscular build.

Next in line was Jabir, the one Erik wanted as the head of the Alchemy department. He possessed a slender physique with distinct features, concealing his eyes behind tinted glasses.

Darius, hopefully the head of Vehicle Production, was the last to step out. He was a man of middle age with a receding hairline and a cheerful expression, attired in a relaxed blazer and denim pants.

Upon noticing each other, Tyree and Jabir's gazes became intense.

Tyree cast a scrutinizing glance at Jabir, his chuckle breaking the silence. "Jabir Sables, the alchemist. Still claiming your potion-making is science?"

Jabir flashed a mischievous grin, unbothered. "It's certainly more scientific than your approach to blacksmithing, Tyree."

A hint of challenge flickered in Tyree's eyes, but his grin never wavered. "I've heard about your recent experiments. Something about a potion to make frogs sing?"

Jabir's laughter was light. "Indeed, an amusing diversion. But, Tyree, let's talk about your latest 'masterpiece'—the so-called unbreakable sword. Didn't it snap during its first skirmish?"

Color crept into Tyree's cheeks, yet he maintained his cool demeanor. "Merely a temporary hitch. Unlike your potions that promise immortality and only upset stomachs."

Jabir's laughter rang out again. "Temporary perhaps, but while a stomachache can be remedied, a broken reputation is a harder fix."

Inches apart, Tyree and Jabir faced each other, their expressions tight, a testament to their long-standing rivalry. Both were masters of their respective crafts, each believing in his superiority over the other.

Darius, sensing the brewing storm, inserted himself between the two, his hands outstretched in a calming manner. "Let's remember why we're here, gentlemen. We have an appointment with Master Kay, and it's in our best interest to focus on that."

As Tyree and Jabir exchanged a final, charged glance, a palpable unspoken challenge hung in the air, their simmering rivalry concealed just beneath the surface.

Tyree, breaking the silence with a reluctant tone, conceded, "Fine, but this isn't over."

Jabir responded with a light, knowing smile, his eyes reflecting both amusement and anticipation. "Wouldn't dream of it."

Darius chided them. "We're here to secure a new opportunity, not to bicker. Let's be professional."

With Darius's practicality as their guide, the trio made their way towards the guild headquarters. Their main purpose for being here was to meet Erik, and any conflicts that may have arisen had to be put on hold. In the meantime.

As Tyree, Jabir, and Darius walked into the grand foyer of Erik's guild headquarters, they were warmly greeted by two waiters who were impeccably dressed. One of them, with a polite nod, said, "Good afternoon, gentlemen. The guild master is expecting you. Please follow me."

While the trio made their way through the decorated corridors of Erik's guild headquarters, they couldn't help but be completely immersed in the overwhelming luxury of their surroundings.

The walls, adorned with exquisite tapestries depicting intricate stories woven with vibrant threads and textures, captured the light and emitted a comforting and welcoming glow.

As they walked through the room, the air itself seemed to be infused with the delicate scent of aged wood and the faint aroma of polished marble, creating an atmosphere of timeless elegance. The marble shining under their feet reflected the magnificent beauty that surrounded them.

With a sense of wonderment, Tyree's eyes widened and he couldn't help but linger on the intricate brushstrokes of the paintings that adorned the walls, each one a true masterpiece in its own right.

With a blend of curiosity and admiration, Jabir immersed himself in the surrounding sights. As he took a deep breath, he could feel the scents of varnish and luxury intertwining in the air, creating a delightful sensation that awakened his senses and cultivated a newfound admiration for the finer aspects of life.

In the meantime, Darius seemed in tune with the ambiance of the place. With every step they took on the polished marble floors, their shoes emitted a gentle clack that resonated in perfect harmony with the rhythm of his heartbeat.

Their journey culminated at a pair of ornate double doors. The waiter, displaying a touch of theatrics, opened the doors, revealing the meeting room.

"The guild master has prepared this room for your discussion." He stepped aside to usher them in.

Inside, the room was a testament to elegance. A long, stately mahogany table was set meticulously with fine china and sparkling crystal glassware.

An array of delectable dishes wafted enticing scents throughout the room. At the head of the table stood Erik, who rose to greet them.

"Welcome," Erik said with a welcoming gesture. "Please, take your seats."

It was impossible to miss the unmistakable blend of formal elegance and luxury that permeated the room. In a silent acknowledgment of the setting, Tyree and Jabir put their rivalry aside.

With his ever observant nature, Darius nodded in silent appreciation of the elaborate arrangement.

Chapter 695: Jabir, Darius and Tyree (2)

As the three men settled into their seats, the atmosphere was tinged with a subtle tension. Tyree was the first to break the silence, his words carefully chosen. "Mr. Kay, it's an honor to be in your presence. I've heard much about your leadership skills and the rapid expansion of your guild."

Jabir followed suit, his tone measured. "Yes, Mr. Kay, the buzz around your guild is quite impressive. It's clear that someone of high intelligence is steering the ship."

"The growth of your guild, Mr. Kay. It's quite the talk among industry circles," Darius said.

Behind his mask, Erik remained unswayed. He sensed their veiled desperation, a result of their recent joblessness because of the Haven Market's termination.

Yet, he also detected a calculated awareness in their words, an understanding that their skills were in demand, giving them a subtle edge in negotiations.

"Thank you for your kind words," Erik said, his voice devoid of warmth.

Erik leaned back in his chair, a contemplative look on his face. His eyes moved from one man to the other, as if measuring their worth. "I'm not the only one here with a successful career," he said, his voice carrying a tone of respect.

"If I'm not wrong, you're among the best in your respective fields." He emphasized the word 'best', acknowledging their expertise and achievements was the right thing to do to win these old geezers.

Pausing, he tilted his head, looking directly at the blacksmith. "Tyree, your blacksmithing skills have set industry standards." He nodded, recognizing Tyree's renowned craftsmanship and influence in the field, hoping to sway him.

Turning his attention to Jabir, Erik's expression softened, faking a hint of admiration. "Jabir, your expertise in alchemy is nothing short of... revolutionary."

Erik's gaze then landed on Darius. His posture relaxed a bit. "And Darius, your work in vehicle production has been groundbreaking."

The three men exchanged glances before turning their attention back to Erik. "Thank you, Mr. Kay, for your kind words," Tyree said, his voice tinged with genuine appreciation. "It's an honor to be recognized by someone of your standing."

Jabir nodded in agreement. "Indeed, your acknowledgment means a great deal to us."

Erik leaned back in his chair, his masked face unreadable as he surveyed the three men before him.

"Now, let's stop with the pleasantries. I've called you here because I'm considering offering you a position within my guild. Positions that would make use of your particular skill sets."

The men exchanged quick glances before Tyree spoke up. "We would be honored to assist you, Mr. Kay. May we inquire about the specifics of these roles and the objectives you have in mind?"

Erik steepled his fingers, a thoughtful expression on his face. "I'm in the process of establishing various production departments within the guild," he said.

Then he paused for a moment, for theatrical reasons. "The aim is to cut down on operational costs," he said, his eyes scanning each of the three men, assessing their reactions.

"And perhaps generate some additional revenue by selling crafted items." His gaze remained fixed on his audience.

"It's a fairly straightforward operation," he said, "Designing blueprints, crafting, and so on."

Erik concluded with a slight nod, "Nothing too grandiose, but necessary all the same." His demeanor projected a sense of calm assurance, but that underlined the importance of the roles he proposed.

Jabir and Darius nodded, absorbing the information, while Tyree asked, "And you'd like for us to head these departments? I mean, that was what we did at the Haven Market."

"In a manner of speaking," Erik said, his tone casual as he leaned slightly forward, emphasizing his point. His gaze swept across the three men, ensuring they grasped the scope of the roles he was outlining.

"You'd oversee the day-to-day activities. Ensure quality control and manage the workforce." He gestured with his hand to denote the routine nature of the tasks.

He leaned back in his chair, crossing his arms as he assessed their reaction to the responsibilities being placed upon them.

Erik concluded, his voice carrying a hint of perspective. "It's important work, but let's not inflate its significance. We're crafting items, not changing the course of history," he said, with a slight shrug.

The men nodded but were slightly disappointed. This was their last chance to get back on track with their lives, and they had to take the best out of this opportunity.

Erik was subtly placing on it. Darius then spoke. "It sounds like a solid position, Mr. Kay. But given what happened with the Haven Market, we need to be certain that we're not stepping into something... questionable."

Erik looked each man in the eye before responding. "I assure you, the guild's operations are legitimate. Our primary focus is to arm our own personnel and sell excess inventory to outside parties. There's nothing illegal about self-sufficiency."

Then, the group kept talking. Erik didn't leave any aspect of the job unchecked, and the men had many questions, like how many people they would have to work, what kind of equipment and the likes.

After some time, Erik leaned back in his chair, his eyes meeting those of the three men seated across from him despite their inability to see them.

The atmosphere was thick with anticipation. "I assume you're curious about the financial aspect of this arrangement," he said, breaking the silence. That was, in fact, an aspect they wanted to know about.

Reaching into a drawer, Erik pulled out three neatly organized folders and slid them across the table. Tyree, Jabir, and Darius each picked up a folder, their eyes scanning the documents inside. The tension in the room seemed to lift as they reached the section detailing their proposed salaries: 100,000 Eurems a month.

The offered remuneration mirrored what they had been making at the Haven Market, yet the nature of the job presented by Erik was different.

In their previous roles, they had engaged in physically demanding tasks, with Tyree bending over the heat of molten metal, shaping it into remarkable creations, and Jabir mixing a plethora of volatile chemicals, crafting complex alchemical solutions.

However, the positions Erik proposed were of a different caliber, focusing more on the intellectual aspects of their crafts.

These roles would require them to apply their extensive knowledge and experience more towards planning, designing, and supervising. It was as if Erik had expected their desire for a change—a shift from the hands-on, labor-intensive work to roles that leveraged their strategic and creative abilities.

In these new roles, the grunt work, the actual manual labor of forging and concocting, would be handed off to a team under their guidance.

This arrangement would not only relieve them from the physical strain of their crafts, but also allow them to command a substantial income, one that was more commensurate with their expertise and less taxing on their physical stamina.

Essentially, they would earn an equivalent salary, perhaps even more, but with less physical exertion, aligning with what Erik had envisioned and now laid out before them.

Their faces broke into wide smiles, almost in unison. Erik noticed, but maintained, his composed demeanor. "I'll give you some time to think it over," he said, as if the deal weren't already sealed.

Tyree was the first to speak. "Mr. Kay, I believe I speak for all of us when I say there's no need for further consideration. We accept your offer."

Erik nodded, a subtle smile forming on his lips. "A wise decision," he said.

"I'll have the contracts drawn up. You are now a member of the guild." Erik spread his arms in a welcoming gesture.

Erik subtly gestured to the waiter, his nod barely perceptible yet understood. In response, the door to the luxurious meeting room swung open, ushering in a procession of waiters.

Each moved with practiced grace, balancing trays laden with an array of gourmet dishes. The aroma of the first course wafted through the air, and the three old crafters mouths started watering.

The waiters arranged the dishes on the ornate table, their movements synchronized like a well-choreographed dance.

The first course was an artistic display of culinary excellence: delicate appetizers, intricately plated, promising a blend of exquisite flavors.

As the array of starters took their places on the table, the room seemed to transform. The earlier air of cautious negotiation gave way to an ambiance of cordiality and mutual respect.

Conversations flowed more freely, punctuated by the clink of fine china and the subtle chime of crystal glassware.

For Tyree, Jabir, and Darius, the acceptance of Erik's offer wasn't just an agreement with a job proposal; it was the gateway to rejuvenated careers and untapped potential.

The lavish spread before them symbolized not just a meal, but the promise of prosperous times ahead.

For Erik, the unfolding scenario was another strategic piece falling into place in his grand plan. Each decision, each alliance formed, was a step towards realizing his goals.

As he observed his new associates settling into this new beginning, a sense of satisfaction filled him. His plan was materializing, each element aligning, just as he had orchestrated.

Chapter 696: Volkov

In a dimly lit training room, the air was thick with tension and the acrid scent of sweat. Lord Volkov, a man of imposing stature, swung his sword ferociously.

Each stroke cut through the air, leaving a trail of invisible energy in its wake. The room reverberated with the sound of the air splitting, as if echoing the inner dark thoughts within him. His face was a mask of concentration, eyes narrowed, jaw clenched.

Just then, the door creaked open, interrupting the rhythm of his solitary practice. A man timidly stepped inside, his eyes downcast, his posture submissive. "F-forgive the intrusion, L-lord Volkov," he said stammering, his voice tinged with fear.

Volkov's sword came to an abrupt halt, hovering in mid-air. He turned his gaze toward the intruder, his eyes like shards of ice. "Speak. What brings you here?"

The man swallowed hard, gathering the courage to deliver his message. "M-my lord, we've lost track of Becker inside the f-forest."

As the words "we've lost track of Becker" settled in the air, something ignited within Volkov. It was as if a dormant volcano had erupted, spewing molten fury in all directions. His eyes, once icy, now blazed like twin infernos.

"WHAT DID YOU JUST SAY?! YOU LOST HIM?!" Volkov said, his voice a guttural explosion that seemed to shake the very foundations of the room.

He hurled his sword toward the wall in one swift, uncontrolled motion. The blade embedded itself into the walls, quivering as if it, too, were afraid of the man who wielded it. The sound of clanging metal reverberated through the room, echoing Volkov's uncontainable rage.

The man who had delivered the news, now pale as a sheet, stood frozen, his eyes wide and unblinking, fixated on Volkov.

A thin sheen of sweat had formed on his brow, betraying the icy dread that gripped him. His lips quivered, struggling to form words that refused to come. Each breath he took was shallow and rapid, like that of a cornered animal, his chest rising and falling in quick succession.

His hands shook uncontrollably, the tremors running down his arms. His feet shuffled nervously, betraying his urge to flee yet rooted to the spot by the sheer intensity of Volkov's fury.

"B-but our scouts believe he is h-headed toward Etrium, sir."

The room was thick with tension for a moment, so palpable it was almost suffocating. Volkov's chest heaved as he breathed, each breath like the bellows of a forge, stoking the fires of his anger. His gaze was locked onto the man with unbridled rage, and his grip tightened around the hilt of his sword, his knuckles turning white. "Etrium? Are you certain?"

The man hesitated, sensing the rising storm within Volkov. "W-we're not entirely sure, my lord. B-but given the circumstances, he has l-little choice but to go t-there."

Volkov slammed his sword into its sheath, the sound resonating like a clap of thunder in the confined space. "Little choice? You are underestimating him. That man has been a thorn in my side for far too long. There is no way he 'only' has that choice. No, he likely has a goal to fulfill there."

Volkov's countenance, initially marred by a storm of anger, subtly shifted as a new thought took root in his mind. The muscles in his jaw relaxed, the taut lines of fury softening as a flicker of realization sparked in his eyes. He paused, the surrounding air charged with a sudden, palpable shift in energy.

His brow, previously furrowed in frustration, now arched in intrigue. A sly, almost cunning smile began to creep across his lips, replacing the scowl that had dominated his features moments before.

Then, as if the dam of his restraint had broken, Volkov erupted into full, unrestrained laughter. "HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAH."

His voice echoing maniacally through the room. The laughter was rich with a sense of triumph and revelation, the product of a mind that had not only seen through a dilemma but had also found amusement in its newfound understanding.

The room seemed to darken, as if absorbing Volkov's madness. The man before him trembled, his eyes still averted. "What would you have us do, Lord V-volkov?" He asked.

Volkov's eyes locking onto a distant point as if peering into the very fabric of fate. "Double the reward for his capture. Send word to our contacts in Etrium. I want that man found, and I want it done yesterday."

The trembling man mustered the courage to speak again, his voice quivering like a fragile leaf caught in a gust of wind. "Lord Volkov, Becker is believed to be near the b-borders, close to the mountains. It's unlikely anyone would search for him t-there. The mountain ranges are d-dangerous, and few can navigate them, especially alone."

Volkov's eyes narrowed, his nostrils flaring as if he were a bull about to charge. "THEN TRIPLE IT! MAKE IT TEN TIMES HIGHER! BUT I WANT THAT MAN'S HEAD!"

Volkov's shout was a sonic boom, a cataclysmic force that seemed to shake the room to its core. The words were not just spoken; they were hurled like spears, each syllable a deadly projectile aimed at the core of the matter.

The man before him flinched as if physically struck, his body recoiling from the sheer force of Volkov's rage.

Volkov's eyes remained locked onto the man, his gaze a laser beam of unyielding intent. "Do you understand me?"

The man nodded, his face pale as a sheet, his eyes wide with a mixture of fear and awe. "Yes, Lord Volkov. I understand."

"Good," Volkov said, his voice dripping with icy resolve. "Now go. And don't return without good news."

The man nodded, his body almost collapsing with relief. "It shall be done, my lord."

The man bowed so low it was as if he were trying to disappear into the floor. He turned and fled the room, his footsteps a hurried patter that seemed to say, 'I must not fail; I dare not fail.' The door closed behind him with a soft but final click, sealing him out and leaving Volkov alone with the tempest of his thoughts.

Alone again, Volkov raised his sword, resuming his relentless practice. But now, each stroke seemed to carry a new weight, a new urgency.

"Becker," he spat the name out like a curse, his voice tinged with a loathing so profound it seemed to vibrate in the air.

"That man is a thorn in my side, a festering wound that refuses to heal. Does he think he can elude me, hide in the shadows like some coward? He underestimates me. He underestimates the lengths to which I will go to eradicate him."

Volkov clenched his fists, his knuckles whitening with the force of his grip. "He's slippery, I'll give him that. A snake slithering through the grass, always just out of reach. But even snakes have their hiding holes, and when I find his, I'll smoke him out and crush him under my heel."

"I did all that just for this nation!" He slammed his fist on the table, his eyes blazing with fury. "They promised me Frant, and I fed their damned thaid for it. The parasite..."

With a swift motion, he brandished his sword; the blade slicing through the air, a physical extension of his anger.

"And if Becker reaches Etrium, it's all over. HE KNOWS!" His voice rose to a crescendo as he hurled the sword, its point embedding deeply into the wall.

"He figured it out, didn't he? That I was the one behind the Heniate!" He paced back and forth, his hands clenched into fists, the veins in his neck standing out.

"Calling in the band of giants... he was onto me. He stayed out of the fray because he knew. If he had fought, he'd be dead by now!"

His chest heaved with each breath, the air around him thick with the heat of his rage. The room seemed to shrink under the intensity of his wrath, the walls themselves appearing to recoil from his seething presence.

"But now they've abandoned me!" Volkov's fist collided with the wall, his knuckles whitening with the impact.

"All the dirty work I did for them!" His voice was a growl as he struck the wall again, the sound echoing through the room.

"MOTHER FUCKEEEERS!"

As Volkov's roar thundered through the room, his final, devastating blow sent the wall crumbling into ruin. A thick cloud of dust erupted, enveloping his towering form. Particles of debris danced in the air, catching the light as they swirled around him.

His face, now a deep crimson from his boiling rage, was etched with veins that stood out like cords, pulsing visibly with every furious beat of his heart.

The dust settled on his skin, creating a gritty, mask-like layer over his features, each grain a testament to his fury.

He inhaled, the air heavy with the scent of pulverized plaster and the faint metallic tang of his own anger. His chest expanded and contracted with each heaving breath, moving like a bellow, stoking a fierce internal fire.

Turning away from the destruction, he shook his hand vigorously, dislodging clumps of dust and debris. The particles cascaded to the ground, some stubbornly clinging to the sweat on his skin.

As they fell, they left behind a stinging sensation, a physical echo of the deep-seated betrayal he felt. His heavy breaths now mixed with the settling dust, creating a tangible, oppressive atmosphere in the once orderly space.

His eyes were dark pits of resolve. "I'll find him. Becker, your time is running out!" His voice was a low, menacing promise, echoing in the dust-filled room.

The room seemed to absorb his words, the walls closing in as if to hold on to the promise of impending death. Volkov felt a dark satisfaction settle over him. It was only a matter of time.

Chapter 697: The Alchemy department (1)

The Alchemy production building was a hive of activity—a labyrinth of glass beakers and cauldrons. The air was thick with the scent of herbs and chemicals, punctuated by the occasional whiff of something less identifiable.

Rows of machines hummed and whirled, their mechanical arms mixing ingredients in vats or measuring out liquids into tiny vials.

Despite the involvement of mana in the production process, the machinery seemed to handle it with ease, as if it had been designed for the purpose.

Alchemists in white lab coats scurried from station to station, monitoring the reactions and jotting down notes in their journals.

Erik and Noah, both masked to conceal their identities, walked through the facility, their eyes scanning the operations.

Workers, also masked and wearing protective gear, moved from station to station, monitoring the machines and occasionally adjusting settings on the control panels.

"As you can see, we've already got a good number of people working here," Noah said, gesturing to the bustling room. "The scale isn't at Haven Market levels yet, but we're getting there."

Erik nodded, impressed but not surprised. "The machinery seems to handle the mana-infused processes well. That is good to see. And you did all of this in 7 days?"

"Yes, master. We had to spend a lot of money to make everything productive within days, but we managed. Of course, we still have much to do before we could start producing at full capacity."

Just then, Jabir approached them, recognizing Erik's mask. "Jabir, good to see you," Erik said, extending a hand.

"Yes, Mr. Kay," Jabir replied, shaking Erik's hand. "It's an honor to meet you again. Are you pleased with what you are seeing?"

"Yes, honestly. I have to thank Noah for his help, since he set everything up. But I also have to thank you since you started producing items just three days after our meeting. This is Noah, by the way," Erik gestured to his clone. "He's been overseeing the setup here."

Jabir nodded at Noah. "Pleasure to meet you."

"So, how are things coming along? What do you think about the setup?" Erik asked.

Jabir bluntly talked to Erik, saying what he had in mind. "Well. There is much to do, to be honest. We still need some equipment to make other products, and the production scale is still not that much. However, considering everything had been set up in a week, I can't complain." He turned to look at Noah.

"Your helper here is a very capable person." Then Jabir smiled.

"You are too generous," Noah said. Jabir replied with a nod, but then turned to Erik again.

"We've already started production on several types of potions. The machines are handling the mana components better than I expected. We're also working on some experimental projects I had in mind that could be game-changers if they pan out."

"That's excellent to hear. I trust you've also reviewed the production goals?" Erik asked.

"Yes, I have," Jabir said. "They're ambitious but achievable. I've already put together a team to focus on R&D. We're aiming to innovate, not just produce."

"Good. That was what I was hoping to hear," Erik said, pleased with Jabir's proactive approach. However, he noticed Jabir had something more to say.

"As for the scale, we're ramping up," Jabir said. "I've been in talks with suppliers to ensure a steady flow of raw materials, but I have yet to talk to the guild's person in charge of the supplies. We should be able to increase production rates significantly in the coming weeks if everything works well."

Erik nodded. "That's what I like to hear. Keep up the good work, Jabir. You're playing a crucial role in the guild's future."

"I'm honored, Mr. Kay, but while we've started with the production of common potions, I believe we need a flagship product if we want to make a significant impact on the market."

Erik nodded, his eyes narrowing behind his mask. "I've been considering that as well. A unique product could set us apart from competitors and give us an edge."

"Indeed." Jabir's eyes lit up at Erik's response. "Do you have any experience in alchemy yourself, Mr. Kay? Any ideas for what this flagship product could be?"

Erik paused for a moment before answering. "I don't dabble in alchemy, but I have some friends who are quite skilled in the field. They've been working on something that could be revolutionary." Erik talked about friends, and not 'friend' as he didn't want to give any kind of hint about who he was, the biological supercomputer.

Jabir's interest was piqued. "Really? That's intriguing. Would these friends be willing to collaborate with us?"

Erik shook his head. "They prefer to remain anonymous for now, but they've agreed to share their research and findings with me. I'll be the intermediary between them and this facility."

Jabir looked disappointed, but nodded in understanding. "Anonymity in our line of work is often a wise choice. As long as we can benefit from their expertise, I have no objections."

"Good," Erik said, pleased that Jabir was flexible and open to unconventional arrangements. "I'll make sure to keep you updated on any developments. Once we have something concrete, we can start the production trials."

Jabir seemed eager by the prospect. A new product was something he always looked forward to. Even if he joined the Haven Market and mostly worked for money, the passion he put in his work was clear. "I look forward to it, Mr. Kay. A flagship product could be the key to establishing our reputation and securing a foothold in the market."

Erik nodded in agreement. Jabir bowed his head, pleased by the compliment. "I'll do my best to live up to your expectations, Mr. Kay."

Jabir gestured for Erik and Noah to follow him as they left the secluded corner. "Let me give you a tour of our current operations," he said, leading them through the maze of machinery and workstations.

As they walked, Jabir pointed to a large vat filled with a luminescent liquid. "Over here, we're producing basic healing potions. They're always in high demand, especially since healers are a rarity."

Erik nodded, observing the workers who were monitoring the vat's contents. "Healers are indeed hard to come by. It's a wise choice to focus on something that can ease that shortage."

Jabir led them to another section where several machines were whirring, their mechanical arms filling small vials with various colored liquids. "These potions focus on healing bones; they are quite effective as they halve the process."

Erik nodded and observed the surroundings. Several intricate machines hummed and whirred in a rhythmic dance, their metallic arms moving with precision.

Each arm, like a skilled artisan, filled small glass vials with liquids that sparkled in a kaleidoscope of colors — vibrant reds, deep blues, luminescent greens, and shimmering golds.

The liquids themselves seemed to glow from within. Some bubbled, while others remained still. Each vial, once filled, was sealed and whisked away along a conveyor belt for further processing. The atmosphere in this section was one of controlled chaos, where science and artistry melded, guided by Jabir's expert hand.

"Impressive."

"Thank you, Mr. Kay," Jabir said, leading them to the last section of the facility. Here, workers were manually combining ingredients in small cauldrons, following complex alchemical recipes.

"And this area is for our more specialized concoctions—antidotes, elixirs for temporary strength boosts, and so on. These require a more hands-on approach because of their complexity."

The size and effectiveness of the operation impressed Erik. "You've done an excellent job starting using the equipment in such a short time, Jabir."

"Thank you, Mr. Kay," Jabir said, pleased. "We're still fine-tuning some processes, but overall, things are running smoothly."

Erik then turned to Noah. "You too, Noah. You've made a great job coordinating the others and supervising things. I can't wait to see what you did with the other departments."

"Thank you, Master."

Noah contemplated the idea of adding that he was present to serve him, but opted not to, acknowledging the potential awkwardness it could create. The thing that he absolutely did not want was for Jabir to get the impression that something strange was happening behind the scenes, which could cause trouble for Erik.

Erik looked around one last time, taking in the organized chaos of the facility. Workers were still tending to their tasks, machines were operating without a hitch, and the air was filled with the scent of herbs and alchemical reagents. "This is a good start," he said.

Jabir smiled, his eyes filled with a mixture of pride and anticipation. "I share your optimism, Mr. Kay. I'm looking forward to what the future holds for us."

As the tour came to a close, Erik's confidence in the alchemy department's progress grew stronger than ever before. With Jabir leading the way and he on his way to make a new product, the achievement of success not only appeared possible but also seemed destined to happen.

Chapter 698: The Alchemy Department (2)

As Erik and Noah emerged from the alchemy production building, the stark contrast between the indoor and outdoor environments was apparent.

Inside, the air had been thick with a medley of potent aromas, each vial and concoction adding to the rich tapestry of scents.

While stepping outside, they were greeted by the fresh air, a welcome respite that felt rejuvenating against their senses.

They moved away from the building, putting distance between themselves and the constant activity of the facility.

The steady hum of machinery and chatter of workers faded into the background as they made their way towards the waiting vehicle.

The limousine parked nearby commanded attention with its sophisticated design.

Its black paint shone impeccably, reflecting the sun's rays in a dance of light and shadow.

The sleek lines of the vehicle spoke of luxury and power, while the tinted windows promised privacy and discretion.

Noah opened the door for Erik, revealing the plush interior that awaited them.

The inside of the limousine was as impressive as its exterior, with comfortable leather seats and a meticulously maintained cabin.

The spacious interior boasted a mini bar, complete with crystal glassware and an assortment of fine spirits.

"So, what's the next step, Master?" Noah asked. It was clear Erik had many things in mind, and he wanted to know what these were.

Erik paused, gathering his thoughts. "We have a solid foundation for mass-producing common potions, but our goal is to create our own version of the brain-stimulating serum."

Erik turned to look outside the window. "We need to find the formula and the ingredients. I will ask the system to do that, but this time I'm not sure the results would be fast." There was a determined tone in his voice.

Noah nodded, aware of the serum's value and the means used to protect its secrets. "I assume the manufacturing process is highly guarded."

"Yes," Erik began, his voice carrying a tone of certainty as he nestled into the leather seat of the limousine.

He turned to face Noah, his expression serious. "It's a closely guarded secret, known only to a select few circles," His fingers tapped on the armrest as he thought.

"We'll need to get our hands on that process." That was of the utmost importance. "But that's easier said than done."

Leaning back in his seat, a slight furrow forming on his brow as he contemplated the complexities of their task.

"I'll have the biological supercomputer search for any available information. But it's going to take time, in my opinion." His gaze drifted back to the window. "And I still have to ask the biological supercomputer."

Noah considered this. "And once we have the formula?"

Erik sighed. "That's just the first hurdle. The production method is another layer of complexity. It's not just about the techniques, the timing, and the conditions, but also about the ingredients and our ability to get them."

"So, how do you plan to tackle that?" Noah asked.

"I still have one vial of the original brain-stimulating serum," Erik said. "I intend to use it. The system can analyze its effects and possibly reverse-engineer the formula."

"Good," Noah said. "At one of the problems can be solved easily." Since he had Erik's memories up to a certain point, he knew how efficient the biological supercomputer was.

The problem lay in that the formula, the ingredients, and everything that was about the serum could be stored on servers not connected to the internet, or worse, on paper. In that case, Erik had to move in person and search for it.

"Yeah," Erik said. "If we do this, our guild members will get insanely strong, and we will have more powerful people join us just to get a vial of the serum."

Noah nodded, understanding how useful the serum will be. He wondered if Erik was going to make one for the body-stimulating serum, so that even he could improve his strength.

"I'll start preparing for any operations we might need to undertake if the formula is not online. Should I also look into people who might have information?"

"Yes, do that," Erik said. "But be discreet. The last thing we want is to tip off anyone about what we're planning."

"Understood," Noah said.

Erik glanced back at the alchemy building. It was becoming a small dot in the distance.

"We're on the brink of something big, Noah. If we pull this off, it could change everything for us." He turned to look at him.

"This step is also necessary for my plans, so I want everyone working day and night."

Noah looked at Erik, sensing the weight of his words. "Then let's make sure we pull it off, Master."

After a brief trip back to the guild's headquarters, Erik disembarked from the stretch limousine.

As he passed through the entrance, he acknowledged the greetings of a few members of the guild who were standing there. As he entered his office and shut the door behind him, the weight of the day's conversations and plans lingered in the air.

Erik sat down at his desk. He turned his focus to the biological supercomputer. "I need you to search for alchemy manuals, ingredient compendiums, and any other relevant information about alchemy and pharmaceuticals. Inject all the data into my brain once you find it. We need to gather as much knowledge as possible."

The supercomputer responded, its voice talking to Erik's from the recesses of his mind.

[UNDERSTOOD. PLEASE BE AWARE THAT THIS MAY BE A TIME-EXPENSIVE PROCESS.]

"How long are we talking about?" Erik asked, leaning back in his chair.

[ESTIMATED TIME FOR COMPLETION OF SEARCH IS APPROXIMATELY TWO WEEKS, USER. THE SEARCH WILL BE CONDUCTED ACROSS MULTIPLE DATABASES, LIBRARIES, AND OTHER SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE.]

Erik nodded, unfazed by the time frame. "That's fine. Start the search. We can't afford to miss any details, no matter how long it takes. I will keep myself busy in the meantime."

[UNDERSTOOD, USER. STARTING THE SEARCH NOW. THE USER WILL BE NOTIFIED UPON COMPLETION.]

A small twitch appeared at the edges of Erik's mouth, hinting at the formation of a smile. Even though the message was concise, it clearly signaled the start of an extensive quest for information.

Once the supercomputer was connected to the internet, it began using its advanced algorithms to scour through a vast array of online databases, electronic libraries, and even secretive online discussion groups.

It was looking for ingredient compendiums, alchemy manuals, and anything else that could be useful to its master.

"Thank you," Erik SAID, thinking about his next move. The game was far from over, and Erik was just getting started.

As soon as Erik heard the confirmation, an overwhelming feeling of excitement overtook him.

The project that lay before was massive and fraught with risks and unknowns. In order to uncover the details of Doran's research, the theft of Thaid's bodies, Uncle Benjamin's involvement, and any other connections to the Blackguards, he recognized the necessity of having a group of individuals under his command.

Erik grappled with the formidable prowess of the Blackguards, weighing the risks of a direct confrontation.

Their reputation as monstrous forces loomed large in his mind, especially after witnessing their ruthless efficiency in action back at Doran's lab.

Yet Erik realized there were alternative strategies to engage this enemy. He considered leveraging the diverse talents within his guild for covert operations.

His members could serve as the eyes and ears on the ground, gathering crucial intelligence, monitoring movements, and unearthing valuable information.

They could be deployed to spy on key figures, infiltrate enemy ranks, and piece together the puzzle of the Blackguards' intentions and capabilities.

The idea occurred to Erik that employing subtler tactics could prove more effective in disrupting and destabilizing his enemies.

By employing tactics such as sabotage, spreading misinformation, and engaging in psychological warfare could be effective in undermining the enemy's control, leading to the creation of chaos that they will be compelled to address.

In this intricate chess game, the production of the serum took on a heightened significance.

Erik recognized its potential to tip the scales in their favor, enhancing his guild members' capabilities exponentially.

But this was not an overnight solution; the creation and distribution of the serum required meticulous planning and time. Every step had to be calculated with precision to ensure the maximum impact.

Erik sat back in his chair and stared at the ceiling for a while before leaning forward again. That's two weeks. It was a modest price to pay for the vast store of information that he desired to gain.

Rising to his feet, he extended his arms forward and stretched them out.

There were other things that needed to be attended to and other pieces on the complicated chessboard that was his existence that needed to be moved around.

For now, progress had been made on a critical part of the puzzle, leaving him with nothing to do except wait for the results.

He knew that patience was crucial, and he trusted that the two weeks of waiting would be worth it.

Chapter 699: The formula

Erik leaned back in his chair, his gaze focused and thoughtful as he spoke to Noah. "Yeah, I'll start working on it as soon as the system finishes the first task," Erik's voice carried a note of determination his clone didn't miss.

Noah, standing before him, nodded in understanding. "All right, Master. Just let me know when you're ready for the next step. I'll be here to assist with whatever you need," Noah's tone was respectful yet infused with a hint of eagerness.

Erik's expression softened, a subtle acknowledgement of Noah's loyalty. "I have a few ideas in mind already." His brow furrowed in thought. "But let's not get ahead of ourselves. We need to first see if there are any hurdles with this initial phase."

"Understood, Master." Noah turned to leave, his movements deliberate and measured.

As Noah reached for the door, he donned his mask. Erik gave a small nod. He couldn't let people see his face. The mask clicked into place, hiding Noah's features, and the clone hybrid left the room.

The place fell silent as Noah left, leaving Erik alone with his thoughts. Erik then waited. The biological supercomputer was going to end its task in a matter of moment. He checked emails and scrolled the news. Then, as he was taking a quick break, while staring at the window, the biological supercomputer showed him the sought notification.

[SEARCH COMPLETED. STARTING DATA TRANSFER.]

The words flashed in front of him. A tingling sensation spread through his brain as the supercomputer began injecting the vast amount of alchemical knowledge it had gathered over the past two weeks.

The process was intense, almost overwhelming. Erik felt as if a torrent of information was flooding his brain, filling every nook and cranny of his consciousness.

Complex formulas, ancient techniques, and rare ingredients—all were laid bare before him. His mind worked to assimilate the data, categorizing and storing it for future use.

[DATA TRANSFER COMPLETE. USER, THE INFORMATION IS NOW ACCESSIBLE.] The supercomputer said, its mechanical voice devoid of emotion inside Erik's mind.

The young man took a deep breath, feeling the weight of the newfound knowledge settle within him.

The newfound clarity in Erik's mind unveiled a world rich in potential, akin to a previously unreadable map now laid bare before him.

The realm of alchemy and pharmaceuticals, once shrouded in layers of complexity, now seemed almost straightforward.

The intricate processes, the delicate balance of elements, the nuanced reactions—all these elements of the craft that had once seemed like a distant, unfathomable language — were now intelligible and ripe for exploration.

Erik's thoughts raced with possibilities. He envisioned concocting new alchemical products, each with unique properties and applications.

He could refine existing potions, enhancing their efficacy or reducing side effects, maybe even discovering breakthrough elixirs that the alchemical community had only dreamed of.

For his guild, this achievement meant a plethora of opportunities. They could cut down on operational costs by producing their own specialized pills and elixirs.

There was the potential for generating substantial revenue through the sale of innovative alchemical products, perhaps even cornering the market with unique potions unavailable anywhere else. His guild's combat capabilities could be enhanced dramatically.

Potions for healing, strength, agility, or even more esoteric effects could give them an edge in any confrontation.

The strategic advantage was undeniable, and the potential for growth and dominance in their sphere was unmistakable.

Yet, amid this whirlwind of potential and excitement, Erik couldn't shake off the awareness of his primary aim.

While the allure of wealth and the promise of revolutionizing the alchemical world were tempting, they were distractions from his goal—gaining power.

His journey wasn't to become a master alchemist or a wealthy guild leader, but to harness and amplify his own personal strength.

<I will have to leave this to Jabir and the others. Maybe give some ideas here and there...>

Erik leaned back in his chair, a satisfied smile crossing his lips. The search had been long, but the results were well worth it.

He was now armed with the tools he needed to take his guild to new heights, and he couldn't wait to get started.

[USER, IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU REQUIRE?] The supercomputer asked.

"Yes," Erik was still reveling in the sense of empowerment that filled him. "I need you to crack the Brain-Stimulating Serum's formula and ingredients. You should have all the required information now to find this information."

[UNDERSTOOD. THE USER IS REQUIRED TO PROVIDE A SAMPLE BY INJECTING IT. STANDING BY. WAITING FOR THE SERUM TO ENTER THE SYSTEM.]

Erik sat at his desk, the vial of brain-stimulating serum cradled between his hands. The liquid inside shimmered. He uncorked the vial and brought it to his nose, inhaling the faint, metallic scent.

With a determined nod to himself, he tipped the vial, allowing the liquid to pass his lips. It cascaded down his throat, leaving a trail of tingling warmth, almost like tiny sparks dancing along his esophagus.

Almost instantly, a noticeable surge coursed through his body. It was as if a dormant power had been awakened, pulsating with vitality.

This newfound energy was more than physical; it permeated his very thoughts, bringing a startling clarity.

Ideas and thoughts that seemed muddled before now snapped into sharp focus, as if his mind had been operating at half capacity until this moment.

Erik's eyes sparkled with renewed vigor as he turned his attention back to the biological supercomputer.

He was aware of every sensation in his body, feeling as if his senses had been heightened.

He expected the biological supercomputer's next notification to appear at any moment.

[ANALYSIS STARTED. ESTIMATED TIME: 2 MONTHS.] The message appeared before his eyes, but it wasn't something good.

<I expected it to take time, but not that much...> Erik thought.

Erik mulled over the timeline provided by the biological supercomputer, his mind racing with thoughts of how the two-month waiting period could derail his plans. To wait for so long stirred a sense of urgency within him, a feeling he couldn't shake off.

"Is there any possibility of accelerating this process?" Erik asked, addressing the biological supercomputer. The thought of waiting for two weeks was manageable.

He did just that, but the prospect of an entire two-month delay that had to be summed to the previous two weeks seemed daunting and counterproductive to his objectives.

[SPEEDING UP THE ANALYSIS IS POSSIBLE. REQUIREMENT: 2000 DNA POINTS.] The supercomputer said.

Without hesitation, Erik allowed the system to debit him the DNA points. [ANALYSIS ACCELERATION STARTED. NEW ESTIMATED TIME: 2 HOURS.] The screen updated.

As the supercomputer worked, Erik leaned back in his chair. The serum he had just consumed was invaluable for its ability to speed up the formation of neural links, but it was not without its drawbacks. Side effects could be severe, and Erik was determined to create a safer alternative.

Two hours seemed like an eternity, but Erik knew that the information he would gain could revolutionize not just his own capabilities, but also the potential of his entire guild.

Reduced side effects meant safer power enhancement, and that was a game-changer in any battle scenario.

After two hours, the system appeared with another flashing notification.

[BRAIN STIMULATING SERUM: INGREDIENTS' AND MANUFACTURING PROCESS'S KNOWLEDGE AVAILABLE.]

Erik couldn't help but smile. The formula and technique for creating the serum were now within his grasp, but that was just the first step.

Now came the last part of the job. Changing the formula so that the resulting serum got similar effects but fewer side effects. Containing the costs was also something he wanted to achieve in order to increase his profits.

The financial gains would be staggering. The original serum was already a high-demand, high-cost item.

A safer, more efficient version would undoubtedly command an even higher price point.

He could see it now: alchemists and warriors from all corners of the world clamoring to get their hands on his creation. Not that it was going to be really him to make it. The system had that job, but since it was part of him, it was like he made it.

The revenue generated could fund not just the guild's operations but also its expansion, research, and development for years to come.

But it wasn't just about the money. The fame and reputation that would come with such an innovation were enticing.

His guild would be catapulted into the limelight, becoming a household name overnight.

They would be the pioneers, the visionaries who took an already groundbreaking serum and elevated it to new heights.

The prestige would attract new members, powerful allies, and even more resources.

The serum could become a cornerstone for his guild's influence, solidifying their standing among the most powerful guilds.

It would be a symbol of their capability, ingenuity, and leadership.

And then there were the strategic advantages. With easier access to a safer serum, his guild members could speed up their own power development, strengthening them.

This would not only deter potential enemies but also make his guild an attractive option for alliances.

Chapter 700: The New technique

With a satisfied smile crossing his face, Erik leaned back in his chair and pondered the future possibilities that the new serum would bring.

However, there were still additional tasks that needed to be completed, other essential components that had to be arranged.

"Thank you for your help," Erik said, addressing the biological supercomputer. "But there's another task I need you to undertake."

[WHAT IS THE TASK, USER?]

"I need you to change the neural link training technique used in Liberty Village. I would like it to be more efficient, but also different from what it is now," Erik said.

"I promised Liberty watch village I wouldn't have shared the technique, so make something similar but also different."

[IT IS POSSIBLE TO CHANGE THE NEURAL LINK TRAINING TECHNIQUE. THE PROCESS WILL REQUIRE ONE MONTH TO COMPLETE.]

Taking a moment to reflect on the time frame, Erik paused. When considering the bigger picture, a month seemed incredibly lengthy, as every single day carried weight and significance. "Can you make it faster?" he asked.

[YES, USER. THE PROCESS CAN BE SPED UP USING DNA POINTS. IT WILL REQUIRE 2000 DNA POINTS TO REDUCE THE TIME TO ONE DAY.]

The system wasted no time in responding, providing an immediate and swift reply. Erik wasted no time and made a swift decision with no hesitation. "Proceed," he said, clarifying that he was allowing the transfer of 2000 DNA points to the system.

As the transaction was being processed, the screen flickered momentarily. [DNA POINTS DEBITED. STARTING THE ADJUSTMENTS TO THE NEURAL LINK TRAINING TECHNIQUE. ESTIMATED TIME FOR COMPLETION: ONE DAY.]

Erik experienced a sudden rush of anticipation, which made him eager for what was to come. Another crucial step in his plan was the modification of the neural link training technique.

By implementing a training method that was both efficient and unique, he could provide his guild members with a competitive edge and enhance the appeal of his guild as well.

By attracting more skilled individuals, their ranks will be further strengthened and their reputation solidified.

Following that, he reclined in his chair, with his fingers suspended over the smooth surface of his desk, which featured a communication panel integrated into its design.

With the simple action of tapping the screen a few times, he began a call. As the panel lit up, it came to life, showing a rotating symbol, which symbolized the connection between Noah, his clone, and his trusted confidant.

With each passing second, Erik's mind raced through a multitude of tasks that lay ahead, causing the seconds to stretch longer and longer.

Right as he was about to tap the screen once more, Noah's mind considering the chance that the call hadn't been completed, his face emerged on the panel.

"Master, how may I assist you?" Through the speakers, the voice of Noah resonated with a crisp tone.

"Come to my office, Noah. There's something important we need to discuss."

"Understood, Master. I'll be there soon." The screen then went blank.

With a pensive expression, Erik directed his gaze towards the ceiling for a moment. Amid all his tasks, he kept in mind that his ultimate aim was to boost his guild's power before setting off for the white Desert.

Taking that step was absolutely necessary, especially because the next part of his plan involved investigating the Blackguards.

It was clear the guild's reliance on him had become problematic and needed to be rectified. In order to ensure that they could take care of themselves, he wanted them to be self sufficient. This way, even if he couldn't assist them, they would still have the skills and knowledge to handle any situation.

Although his clones possessed remarkable intelligence, their potential was limited if Erik failed to provide them with the tools to capitalize on it.

Noah's arrival was signaled by the soft chime of the door, interrupting his thoughts. Erik sat up, prepared and eager to set the next phase of his plan into motion.

As Noah entered the room, he made eye contact with Erik while closing the door behind him. "You called for me, Master?" he asked, his tone respectful yet tinged with curiosity.

Erik gestured for Noah to take a seat across from him. "Yes, I have some important updates. I've nearly completed the tasks at hand. The biological supercomputer gained the formula for the brain-stimulating serum," Erik said, his voice tinged with a sense of accomplishment.

Noah's eyes widened. "That's incredible, Master. This will be very useful."

"Indeed," Erik nodded, "but we're not stopping there. The next step is to create a new formula based on the original."

"Is this possible?" Noah asked.

"Of course. Did you forget who is helping me?"

"No, Master."

"The new serum will have fewer side effects and will be produced at a lower cost." Erik said, turning to look at the window. "Once we have that, we'll be able to revolutionize not just our guild, but the entire landscape of neural link training. "

Filled with eagerness, Noah leaned forward, captivated by the prospect. "They will become dependent on us. I doubt people will let this opportunity pass. If we sell the serum at an affordable price, we can increase the number of people we sell it to, and still make a profit."

"Exactly," Erik said.

Noah acknowledged Erik's actions with a nod, recognizing the potential they held and wanting to grasp the opportunity they were offering. "There is much we need to work on, then. I bet the demand will be so high, we will have problems serving many people. We should further boost our production capabilities."

"I thought the production center you bought was already ok in that regard?" Erik asked.

"It is, Master. You already told me what you wanted to do, and I bought the things needed to start the production. The problem is that Jabir called me during these hours. He told me the guild members are requiring much potions we all initially assumed."

"I can't blame them," Erik said. "This is the first time they got something like this at the prices we are providing them." He turned to look at Noah. "Are you selling to them at the production cost, right?"

Noah looked Erik in the eyes. "As you instructed. If I may, that was a very kind thing for you to do."

"Yeah, they often had to get into debt just to buy a potion. I want to help them grow if I can. I want to give them the chance I didn't get when I was in their shoes."

Erik smiled. "back to topic. I need you to oversee the initial stages of production once the new formula is ready. Jabir will be tasked with making the product, but I want you to monitor him. Make sure everything is set up and ready to go. We can't afford any mistakes."

"Of course, Master. I'll ensure everything runs smoothly. Is there anything else?" Noah asked.

"Yes. You must also make sure the formula doesn't come out. Every person in the manufacturing process must not know who the others are, and must only know a single unimportant part of the process." Erik said.

Noah looked at Erik, awaiting further instructions. "I will make sure everything will go as you wish. Is there anything else?"

Erik shifted his gaze to meet Noah's. "Ah, yes. Tomorrow, the biological supercomputer will complete the development of a new neural link training technique. It's an alteration of the one we gained from Liberty Village."

Noah's eyes lit up at the news.

Erik continued, "I want you to arrange training sessions with our most trusted guild members—Lila, Mira, Kael, and Aiden. They will be the first to test this new technique. Their feedback will be invaluable for any further refinements."

"Understood, Master," Noah said, mentally scheduling the sessions. "I'll make sure everything is arranged."

"Excellent," Erik said, satisfied. "If this new technique works as expected, it could set a new standard for neural link training. We may get the most powerful guild in the entire nation if we play this right."

Noah stood, ready to carry out his orders. "Then, if there is nothing else to do, I will take my leave, Master."

Erik nodded. "Yes. Thanks Noah. Now go, we have much to prepare for."

Noah's departure from the room prompted Erik to lean back in his chair, deep in thought about the immense transformations that awaited his guild.

The next few days were going to hold immense significance, not only for him or the guild, but for the entire world.

What he was going to make was akin to what Elara Steel hands did with the creation of the brain crystal weapons.

Erik had to plan for the Blackguards, along with their henchmen, who will undoubtedly attempt to get the technique and formula of the serum.

In case things took a turn for the worse, he required a secure location where he could seek refuge, gather his forces, and ensure the safety of his people. He already had some ideas in mind.