

## BIOLOGICAL 701

### Chapter 701: Training Technique and New Serum

Erik stepped into the sterile, white-walled lab of the guild's new Alchemy and Pharmaceutical department.

The air was tinged with the scent of chemicals and mana-infused solutions. Rows of glass beakers, vials, and high-tech machinery lined the counters.

Lab technicians in white coats moved about, engrossed in their tasks. At the center of it all was Jabir, the Chief of the department, hunched over a table scribbling notes.

Erik approached him, a sealed envelope in hand. "Jabir," he said, capturing the man's attention.

Jabir looked up, his eyes meeting Erik's masked gaze. "Ah, Master Kay, what brings you here?"

Erik extended the envelope toward him. "Read this."

Curiosity piqued, Jabir took the envelope and opened it. As his eyes scanned the first few lines, his expression shifted from curiosity to shock.

His eyes widened behind his glasses, and he looked up at Erik, who stood there with an amused smirk.

"Is this... real? Does it work?" Jabir said. His voice stammered frequently.

"It works," Erik said, his voice steady and confident. "But it still needs to be tested."

Jabir nodded, his mind racing with the implications of what he'd just read. The product Erik was describing to him through the paper could revolutionize their entire market; no the entire world, catapulting their guild to unprecedented heights.

Erik's tone shifted, becoming more serious, almost threatening. "Noah will supervise the production process. No one will know the full formula and the manufacturing process. Not even you." Of course, Erik had no way of knowing what this man could infer from hearing the others or while supervising the process with Noah. "I trust this won't find its way outside these walls."

The tone of the guild master was filled with seriousness. Jabir, who had been an important part of the Haven Market, was aware that there was also a veiled threat in those statements.

If he were to anger this man, the consequences for him would be severe and he would face retaliation.

The fear in Jabir's eyes was unmistakable as he faced the much younger man, who possessed a superior power, clear from the noticeable ripples in the mana surrounding him.

"It won't," he said.

Erik leaned in closer, his voice dropping to a near whisper, "Make sure the employees working on this don't understand the entire manufacturing process. I don't want any leaks."

Jabir felt a chill run down his spine at Erik's words. That was an enormous responsibility. "Understood, Master Kay. I'll handle it personally."

Erik nodded, satisfied with Jabir's response. "If you need anything, contact Noah as usual."

In that moment, Noah, who had been standing in silence next to Erik, took a step forward. Similar to Erik, he also donned a mask, making it impossible to decipher his emotions. But his posture, rigid and alert, signaled his readiness to act on any command.

"Let's go," Erik said, turning toward the exit.

They walked out of the lab together, with Noah matching his steps, and the door closed behind them, producing a gentle hiss.

While they were leaving, Jabir experienced a mix of emotions, feeling both exhilarated and burdened.

According to the results presented in the paper, it was showed that the product desired by Erik has the ability to replicate the effects of the brain stimulating serum, albeit with minimal side effects and a slightly reduced level of potency.

Erik made a promise to him. He would create a flagship product, something that no other guild would be able to create, and he fulfilled that promise. Jabir hadn't been given a formula, but a complete report of the serum's effect had already been given. That meant the formula existed.

"I wonder who is the genius that made this thing. He didn't say who he was," Jabir said to himself, referring to Erik, "But I'm sure he won't be able to keep his identity a secret for long. When the product comes out, everyone will be on the search."

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As Erik and Noah exited the alchemy lab, the sterile white walls giving way to the more subdued tones of the guild's main corridor, Erik turned to his clone. "How's the progress with the new neural link-establishing technique? Are Mira, Aiden, Kael, and Lila learning it well?"

Noah, walking in step with Erik, considered the question. "They're learning, Master, but it's not as straightforward for them as it was for you. However, they're on the right track. Once they've mastered the technique, we can roll it out to the rest of the guild after some more testing."

Erik nodded, satisfied. "Good. And what about the training courses I asked you to set up for the other guild members?"

"The courses have started, and the reception has been overwhelmingly positive. Many guild members are showing promise in mastering specific weapon styles. They're also training in vehicle and artillery operation."

"Excellent work, Noah. Thank you."

Just as they were about to reach the exit, Noah directed his attention towards Erik, his voice filled with a trace of excitement.

"Don't forget, Master, the party is tonight. We've rented a venue nearby, and I've invited some influential figures from Testrovsc's Rest high society."

Erik sighed inwardly. Social gatherings were not his forte, but he understood their importance. "How did you get all these people to come?" the young man asked his clone.

Noah chuckled. "It wasn't difficult, Master. Word got out that you were hosting a party, and the requests to attend started flooding in."

Erik raised an eyebrow. "Really?"

Noah looked at Erik and nodded, his eyes invisible because of his mask. "You underestimate your fame, Master. Your reputation has soared, especially after completing that quest in the White Desert. Many turned it down, but you succeeded. People are intrigued by you, and they aspire to be part of your circle."

Noah's words lingered in Erik's mind as he pondered their meaning. His dedication to his projects and the development of the guild had consumed him to the point he was left out by the city's situation.

It was clear he had not fully comprehended the magnitude of his increasing popularity.

The quest that took place in the White Desert proved to be extremely dangerous and challenging for the members of his guild, but it also marked a poignant moment in the guild's journey, establishing both his personal influence and the guild's reputation as formidable entities.

"Very well," Erik finally said. "I'll be there."

Noah nodded, pleased. "I thought you'd see the importance. It's not just a party; it's a strategic gathering. We can take our chance to meet and know important people. We can upscale our operations, make deals, and hoard the best quest in the city if we play this well."

Erik experienced a mixture of both excitement and nervousness as he and his clone left the building, with the late morning sun stretching their shadows across the ground.

The party was more than just a celebration; it was an opportunity for him to solidify his influence and expand his network.

Although he wasn't particularly eager about the idea, he understood it was an essential part of the bigger plan.

"Let's make it a night to remember," Erik said, more to himself than to Noah.

Noah grinned, even though it was hidden behind his mask. "Oh, it will be, Master. It will be."

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[Host Information]

NAME: Erik Romano

AGE: 18

POWER LEVEL: 380

SYSTEM LEVEL: 46

EXPERIENCE: 95660/115600

DNA POINTS: 20850

HEALTH: 3440/3440

MANA: 3370/3370

{Attributes}

STRENGTH: 179

INTELLIGENCE: 221

DEXTERITY: 159

ENERGY: 167

Available Attributes points: 0

{Powers}

[Biological Super Computer Powers]

-Brain Crystal Manipulation

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

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

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

- (LOCKED)

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

-(LOCKED)

-DNA Manipulation

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

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

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

- (LOCKED)

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

-(LOCKED)

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

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

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

[Host's Powers]

POISONOUS MANA DARTS: C $\sigma$ 3D-RANKED (Conjure poisonous mana darts whose lethality depends on the mana injected)

POISONOUS ASTRAL WOLF BITE: C $\sigma$ 2D-RANKED (Conjure an astral but solid projection of a Leylahad's head whose only aim is to bite at whatever target the host is aiming. Its teeth have a poisonous element whose Toxicity depends on the mana used. Notice: the target must be close to the projection)

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

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

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

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

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

**CHAMELEON VEIL: Cp2C-RANKED** (Allows to turn totally transparent and to project what is behind you, making it almost impossible to be seen. The user can move while using this Brain Crystal power. However, notice that the ripples in light the power creates while moving decrease the power's hiding abilities increasing the chance of being seen.)

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

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

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



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

THELEPATHY: C<sub>p</sub>1C-RANKED (It allows Telepathic talk with creatures of the same species or similar DNA)

SOLIDIFYING SLIME: C<sub>o</sub>1D-RANKED (It allows to produce a slimy substance whose viscosity, stickiness and quantity depends on the amount of mana used. The Slime can solidify and its hardness depends again on the mana used)

AEROKYNESIS: C<sub>o</sub>3A-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 702: The party (1)

The night had fallen, enveloping the world in its velvety darkness, and the moment had arrived for Erik's party.

As he left his room, the man took a moment to adjust the mask, ensuring his features were hidden. Just a moment later, the door located across the hall swung open and a figure emerged, revealing Mira's presence.

Behind his mask, Erik's eyes widened in surprise. Mira looked stunning, her flawless makeup highlighting her natural beauty. Her face was framed by the cascading soft waves of her long, dark hair, which was usually braided over one shoulder.

With her choice of dress, she balanced elegance and daring, revealing just enough to captivate anyone's imagination. However, the woman wore the usual green she used every day.

Because it was her favorite color, she couldn't resist choosing a dress of the same shade of green that she liked so much. The attire she wore seemed to amplify the brilliance of her already radiant, piercing eyes.

There was a moment during which Erik felt an irresistible magnetic pull, a powerful attraction that he couldn't brush off. The mask he was wearing and the party they had to go to prevented him from taking her there, even though he would have if he could.

Mira, though unable to see Erik's face because of his mask, sensed his gaze fixed on her, as if guided by a sixth sense.

"You might want to wipe that drool off your mask." To Erik, those words appeared as if sung by a canary.

A chuckle escaped his lips, but the sound was muffled because of the mask he was wearing. "Stop it," he said, shaking his head in mock exasperation.

Mira's eyes sparkled mischievously as she leaned in closer. "So, Erik, are you all set for tonight?" Her eyelashes fluttered playfully, like the delicate plumes of a secretary bird.

Erik sighed, his posture slumping. "You know how much I loathe these social gatherings."

"Oh, c'mon, how bad can it be?"

"Very bad. What if I do something embarrassing?"

"Then you think you do this for the guild's sake. You smile and go on as if nothing happened." She fussed over his bowtie, straightening it with nimble fingers.

"You'll need to be on your best behavior and make nice to everyone. Noah did a good job by making all these people attend. You it to him." Once satisfied, her hand drifted up to pat his chest. "Perfect," she said, her eyes shining with pride.

Erik looked at Mira, her earnest expression making it hard to argue. "You're right. I'll play the part," but then he said, "Though, a lot of girls will probably try to approach me... oh... what should I do then?"

"You better not tread into dangerous fields, Erik Kay."

"Sorry boss!" was all he could say while embracing her.

Mira smiled, satisfied. "Good. Now, let's go. We have a party to attend, and you're the guest of honor."

While they made their way towards the exit of the guild's headquarters, Erik experienced a whirlwind of emotions brewing inside him.

Without a doubt, there was a sense of apprehension when thinking about the idea of spending an evening in a social setting that was unfamiliar and outside of his comfort zone.

Despite this, there was an underlying sense of anticipation, which was further intensified by the mere presence of Mira and the possibilities that the night had in store.

As they approached the door, Erik felt a surge of anticipation building within him. When the door swung open, he took a deep breath to steady his nerves.

Just as Erik and Mira exited the guild's headquarters, a luxurious black limousine arrived and stopped right in front of them.

With a deferential nod, the driver, adorned in a crisp uniform, opened the door, showcasing his attention to detail.

The moment they climbed into the limousine, it took off, soaring through the sky with grace before finally landing on one of the upper floors of a towering skyscraper, which was one of the few magnificent structures that adorned the breathtaking skyline of Testrovsc's Rest.

Once again, the driver opened the car doors, prompting Erik to walk around to Mira's side in order to offer his help.

With a graceful gesture, he reached out his hand, which she accepted, gripping his arm as they walked towards the elevator.

Erik's finger hovered over the control panel before landing on the button marked "99."

As soon as he pressed it, the elevator sprang into action, ascending with remarkable speed, its movements so flawlessly executed that it was impossible to detect any motion at all.

As soon as the doors slid open, an impressive and magnificent spectacle unfolded before their eyes. The room, with its expansive size and clear design tailored for dancing and social gatherings, was impressive.

The soft glow of chandeliers hanging from the ceiling created a beautiful reflection on the polished marble floors.

A lavish buffet, filled with an assortment of sumptuous dishes and fine wines, had already been set up along the sides of the room.

However, the aspect that captured Erik's attention the most was the large gathering of people.

The room was filled, and it seemed like everyone who was anyone in Testrovsc's Rest high society was there.

As they exited the elevator, they were met by the sight of a young, stylish man clad in a sleek tuxedo.

His attire was tailored, fitting his slender frame and complementing his youthful appearance.

With a well-groomed head of hair and an air of silent confidence, he held a microphone with an ease that suggested both professionalism and poise.

Despite his youth, he exuded the demeanor of an experienced butler, blending elegance with efficiency.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Mr. Erik Kay and his companion, Miss Mira Windwhisper!"

As the room erupted with clapping and cheering, expressing their admiration, all eyes gravitated towards Mira.

The moment she entered the room, her presence had a captivating effect on the crowd, catching the attention of both men and women.

With an ensemble that emphasized her figure, particularly around her chest area, her attire was both revealing and elegantly styled.

Her décolletage was framed by the dress, creating a captivating blend of allure and sophistication. The tasteful display, along with the rest of her stunning attire, had the effect of making her the undeniable focal point of the room.

While a flush of embarrassment arose to his cheeks, Erik concealed any visible reaction behind his mask. However, he directed his focus to Mira.

"You did this on purpose?" A tint of jealousy appeared in his voice.

"Of course I did! I'm with Erik Kay! Did I have to look like a zombie?" A light chuckle eluded her lips.

"But maybe this is too much..." A small frown appeared on Erik's face. She couldn't see it, but used to Erik's tone, she imagined him with it.

"Look at it this way. If I look good, this positively reflects on you..."

Erik let out a grumble of frustration. Not only did he dislike all the attention, but he also disliked even more the idea of Mira being seen with those lascivious eyes.

The woman then leaned in closer, her lips almost touching his ear, as she spoke in a voice barely audible over the loud noise surrounding them.

"Don't think about it and enjoy the dinner," she said, a hint of amusement in her tone. "You are also quite the sensation."

Erik couldn't help but let out a chuckle. He couldn't help but feel grateful as he wore his mask, which not only hid his blushing cheeks but also concealed the wicked smile he directed at those who lusted after Mira.

"I bet this welcoming was your idea," he said back, his eyes meeting hers for a brief, electric moment.

As Mira was about to reply, her eyes shimmering with delight, the room was engulfed in another round of applause.

"I swear it isn't!" She said back.

Erik found himself burdened by the weight of the crowd's expectations, the lingering unspoken questions surrounding the man hidden beneath the mask, and the responsibility that came with leading his guild.

Not only did this moment carry immense importance for him, but it also had far-reaching implications for the future success and growth of his guild.

The alliances he could form, the impressions he could make—everything hinged on this night.

As the applause faded away, Mira leaned closer once again, her voice filled with a hint of urgency that mirrored his own internal thoughts. "Let's go."

Erik nodded in agreement, taking a deep breath to calm his nerves. Side by side, Mira and he took a step forward, immersing themselves into the room and preparing themselves for the intricate dance of social politics and personal dynamics that awaited them.

This event marked his official entrance into high society, resembling a coming-out party, and he knew his every action and word would undergo intense scrutiny and analysis.

However, in this moment, what counted was the present—the immediate obstacles of the night and the potential it offered.

#### Chapter 703: The Party (2)

As Erik and Mira navigated through the bustling crowd, each step was met with eager faces and respectful nods. The room buzzed with an undercurrent of excitement, and Erik, hidden behind his mask, felt the weight of many gazes fixed on him.

People, drawn by his newfound prominence, flocked to them, extending hearty congratulations for his achievements. They addressed Erik in a formal tone, calling him "Master Kay," a title that felt foreign to him. Mira, by his side, shared in the awkwardness, her discomfort mirroring his.

Among the throng, entrepreneurs and influential figures proposed collaborations. They pitched ideas and ventures, seeking to intertwine their paths with Erik's. The proposals ranged from business partnerships to strategic alliances, with each person more enthusiastic than the last.

Erik, unaccustomed to such attention, nodded along, his responses measured but non-committal.

The interactions grew more personal as some guests broached the subject of private quests. They detailed missions and adventures, hoping to enlist Erik's unique skills.

The specifics of these quests were intricate, often entailing complicated scenarios that required Erik to study them before accepting. Mira, sensing his discomfort, offered polite smiles but remained silent, her presence a steady anchor amidst the overwhelming tide of conversations.

As the evening wore on, the discussions took a more intimate turn. Several families, seeing an opportunity, began discussing potential marriage alliances with their daughters or sons. The proposition of such personal arrangements left both Erik and Mira embarrassed, though they masked their discomfort with practiced poise.

For Erik, these interactions were challenging. His life before arriving in Etrium had been far from the grandeur and complexity of these social circles.

He was unaccustomed to dealing with people this much, especially those much older and more experienced than him. The conversations felt like a swamp from which it was hard to come out.

Mira, equally unprepared for the intensity of these exchanges, offered supportive glances to Erik. Despite their unease, they maintained a facade of composure, not wanting to betray any hint of their internal puzzlement or confusion generated by some requests.

Throughout the evening, Erik and Mira navigated this gauntlet of social interaction with as much grace as they could muster.

They politely excused themselves from conversations that became too invasive or personal. Their replies were diplomatic, careful not to offend their well-intentioned but overbearing interlocutors.

Erik felt the mental exhaustion setting in already. Each new introduction, each proposal, and each personal inquiry chipped away at his reserve. Mira, ever observant, could sense his fatigue and steered them towards quieter corners of the room when she could.

In these fleeting moments of respite, they exchanged looks of understanding, a silent acknowledgment of the surreal nature of their situation.

As they reached the buffet, a voice boomed out, "The buffet is now open!" Almost immediately, the crowd surged toward the tables, eager to partake in the feast.

Amid the sea of faces, Erik's eyes locked onto a familiar one—Lysa, his merchant friend and collaborator. With her high cheekbones and piercing blue eyes, she commanded attention wherever she went. With her hair tied back in a neat bun, she exuded an air of professional elegance. However, that was Erik's last thought. What he wanted to do was to stay away from some particularly bothersome guests.

"Lysa, it is good to see you," Erik greeted, extending his hand.

"Congratulation for the party. Let me guess, it was Noah's ideas, right?" She had a smirk on her face, as if she was amused to see Erik decline marriage proposals. Her eyes met Mira's. "I bet you waited all this time just to tease me."

In response, her smirk grew wider. Then Mira approached the duo. She had enough of marriage proposals, and seeing Erik talking with another stunning woman upset her a little.

"Lysa!" Erik's girlfriend hugged Lysa and gave her a kiss on her cheek. "Mira!" Lysa said with a smile. "You look stunning!"



The trio initially joked a little, with the two women allying themselves and teasing Erik. However, the conversation shifted to recent business ventures and the success of Erik's guild.

Lysa seemed sincerely happy with the achievements of Erik's guild and how their business was going, and the young man was filled with a sense of pride as he held the woman in high regard. She was one of the reasons his guild had this massive financial success.

But just as the conversation was hitting its stride, Mira's eyes darted across the room, locking onto another figure. She noticed this woman was looking at Erik, and it was clear she wanted to talk to him.

"Lysa," Mira said, her tone polite but firm. "Would you mind accompanying me for a moment? There's something I'd like to discuss with you."

"Of course," Lysa said, sensing the urgency in Mira's voice. "Erik, we'll catch up with you later."

With that, Mira and Lysa excused themselves, leaving Erik standing alone near the buffet. As they walked away, Erik was left there, not understanding what was happening or why Mira and Lysa left, until he saw someone approaching. It was Testrovs's Rest's Mayor, Elara Bonner.

She was a woman that commanded attention everywhere she went. Her height was striking, and her posture conveyed a sense of dignity and poise. She wore her silver curls in a cascade that framed a face etched with years of political maneuvering. But scars in many parts of her body showed she was a mercenary before jumping to politics.

Her sharp, hawk-like eyes scanned the room, taking in every detail. The lines of her tailored suit announced her authority and power before she even spoke. She approached Erik with confident strides, but she faked that was a coincidental move.

"Ah, Erik Kay, the new city sensation."

"Mayor," Erik said, nodding his head in a show of respect. His voice was steady, but behind the mask, his eyes were alert, gauging the woman before him.

"I've heard quite a bit about you." Her eyes narrowed slightly. "Your guild has been the talk of the city. What's your secret?"

"Hard work, Mayor," Erik said, maintaining his composure. His tone was polite but guarded. He was also choosing his words with care. The last thing he wanted to do was to reveal too much or offend the mayor because of a phrasing.

She chuckled, making a low, almost mocking sound. "Hard work? Surely you jest. How can an 18-year-old amass such power and influence? You're rivaling guild leaders who've been in the game for decades."

"Thank you, Mayor, but there is not really that much aside from hard work." Erik couldn't show his smile because of the mask, but forced himself to appear as humble as possible.

She raised an eyebrow, her gaze piercing. "If it were merely hard work, we'd have a city full of Erik Kays, wouldn't we?"

An awkward silence hung in the air, thick and palpable. Her scrutinizing gaze bore down on Erik, but he held his ground. After what felt like an eternity, he spoke up and broke the silence. "Is there anything I can do for you, Mayor?"

"Ah, right to the crux of the matter, I see," she said, her lips curling into a half-smile that didn't quite reach her eyes.

"I have a proposition for your guild. I've been rather... unsatisfied with the Border Wolves' performance on recent missions we gave them through the guild."

Erik's eyes narrowed behind his mask, intrigued yet cautious. Mayor Bonner's words were laced with an underlying agenda, and he was aware this was more than just casual conversation.

"Is that so?" Erik said, his tone tinged with curiosity. "And what sort of proposition are we talking about?"

Mayor Bonner leaned in closer, her eyes locking onto his masked face, as if trying to read the thoughts behind it.

"Let's just say it's an opportunity that could be mutually beneficial. But it's not something to discuss here, among prying eyes and ears," she said while turning to look at David Miller, the Border Wolves' leader, who was looking at them talking.

Erik considered her words, sensing the significance of the offer yet to be revealed. "Very well, Mayor. I look forward to hearing more about this opportunity."

"As do I, Mister Kay. As do I," she said, her eyes glinting with a mixture of anticipation and calculation.

"My office will contact you to discuss this matter. I will leave you at your party now. Have fun, young man," she said.

With a nod, they parted ways, each contemplating the concealed words behind their exchange. The air seemed to thicken around them, as a subtle tension was conveyed by their postures. In fact, many people saw them talking, but refrained from approaching them.

They stayed away from the Mayor, for her obvious influence inside the city, but for Erik was because most of them, if not all, were weaker than him. Aside from his clones, no one knew the extent of his power, but what the public knew was that he was powerful, much more than they could ever be.

Mira returned, her eyes scanning the room before landing on Erik. She navigated through the crowd, her dress flowing elegantly with each step. "So, what did Mayor Bonner want?" she asked. If the mayor approached him, there must have been a reason, and if there was one, it had to be important.

Elara Bonner was known to be someone that wasn't easy to approach, and hearing of her going to someone else was even less heard.

Erik turned to face her, his masked visage betraying no emotion. "She mentioned a proposition, something she seemed keen on but didn't elaborate on," he said.

Mira's eyebrows arched in intrigue. "A proposition? That's rather vague. Did she give any hints?"

"No, she was vague," Erik said. "She said it's not something to discuss here, among prying eyes and ears and that she wants to talk at a later date."

Mira pursed her lips, contemplating the implications. "That's interesting. Mayor Bonner isn't one to beat around the bush. If she's being cryptic, it must be something significant."

"I thought the same," Erik said. "She seemed to have an ulterior motive, something she's not ready to disclose yet."

Mira nodded, her eyes narrowing thoughtfully. "Well, whatever it is, we should tread carefully. Mayor Bonner is a seasoned politician; she knows how to play her cards and how to move on the field."

"Agreed," Erik said, his eyes meeting Mira's. "We'll find out soon enough what she's up to. For now, let's focus on the evening."

Mira smiled, her eyes softening. "Of course, this is a celebration for the guild's successes, after all. Let's enjoy the night."

And with that, they turned their attention back to the festivities, but the conversation with Mayor Bonner lingered in the back of their minds, a puzzle yet to be solved.

#### Chapter 704: The Party (3)

Erik and Mira navigated through the mass of people and saw Kael, Aiden, Lila, and Noah engaged in conversation. The party noise made it difficult to make out the group's conversation, although they were drawing near.

Upon noticing Erik's and Mira's arrival, the group's faces lit up. "Hey guys!" Their voices were filled with genuine warmth as soon as the two reached them.

"Hey!" Mira's smile bloomed like those vibrant spring flowers in full bloom, spreading warmth and joy all around.

"Are you enjoying the party?" Kael asked. He was looking at Mira and Erik with an amused smile. "Noah here spent a lot of time planning it."

Erik glanced at Noah, but his masked face made it impossible to know what he was thinking. However, he knew there was an expectant expression on his thaid-like face.

Since he knew how much Noah worked to make this party, he didn't plan on disappointing him. "I am, thank you. And thank you, Noah, for going to such lengths for this."

Noah nodded, his eyes meeting Erik's. "Anything for you, Master."

At that moment, Erik's mind connected with Noah's through a telepathic link, thanks to his brain crystal power. Noah's acceptance of the communication triggered a tingling sensation, signaling the power's readiness.

Erik's frequent glances towards the leader of the Border Wolves served as the motivation for his actions. The man was becoming increasingly intoxicated, and given how people behaved in such situations, Erik was confident that he would cause trouble.

Erik's guild had experienced an extraordinary level of growth in the preceding months, though that was not the root cause of the problem. The truth was that his guild was slowly but surely supplanting the Border Wolves in terms of their dominance. Be it in quest or renown.

"Monitor David Miller, the Border Wolves' guild master," Erik said, his voice boomed inside the clone's mind.

"Why?" Noah asked. If Erik gave such an order, there had to be a reason, but he was curious.

"I've noticed him staring at Mira and me quite a bit. It's unsettling."

"Understood," Noah said through the telepathic link. "I'll keep tabs on him."

"Good. I'll keep the link open so that you can share any news with me."

"All right, Master."

Following that, the two individuals entered a period of silence with no further communication. With a polite excuse, Noah made his way out of the group, his eyes darting around the room as he went to locate David Miller.

"Where's Noah off to?" Lila asked, her eyes following Noah's retreating figure.

"He has some guild matters to attend to," Erik said.

"Ah, the life of the guild manager never stops, does it?" Aiden chuckled at his own remark.

Erik smiled, though his mask hid it well. "It seems so."

Mira, sensing something was wrong, steered the conversation toward lighter topics. "So, who's up for some dancing?"

The woman's eyes were filled with a sparkling excitement that was impossible to miss. Her gaze shifted towards Erik, and in that moment, her eyes transformed into an irresistible, puppy-like expression.

"Mira? NO!"

"I want to dance," Mira said. Her eyes were sparkling with an eagerness akin to a kitten gazing at a dangling string.

Erik hesitated, his posture stiffening. "I'd rather not," he said.

Mira pouted, her eyes widening in a silent plea. "Oh, come on, Erik. It's a party. We are supposed to have fun!"

With concealed eyes, Erik directed his gaze towards her, his hesitation becoming clear. "I don't know, Mira. Dancing isn't my thing."

"But it's mine," she said. "And I want to do it with you."

Erik let out a sigh, a sound that was more like a resigned chuckle than anything else. "Alright, you win. Let's dance."

Mira's face lit up with joy, her eyes sparkling like the brightest stars in the night sky. With a firm grip, she reached out and took hold of Erik's hand, guiding him towards the crowded dance floor.

Couples and groups had already filled the area, engrossed in the music's rhythm, creating a bustling atmosphere.

With their faces flushed and beaming with happiness, the men, dressed in tailored suits, and the women, attired in elegant dresses, danced and spun in perfect harmony.

When Erik and Mira made their way onto the dance floor, they chose a spot amongst the other dancers.

A silent agreement passed between Kael and Lila as their eyes met during their exchanged glance. With a barely noticeable nod, they made their way towards the dance floor, their movements synchronized, as if being guided by an invisible hand.

Aiden sighed. Despite being left alone, he didn't mind because he had noticed a young woman who caught his interest. Throughout his life, Aiden encountered no difficulties in attracting girls. Maybe he would get laid even tonight.

Taking Lila's hand in his own, Kael led her towards the center, making sure they were positioned near Erik and Mira. Lila placed her hand on Kael's shoulder, while he rested his on the small of her back.

While their two friends were getting into position, Mira rested one hand on Erik's shoulder, then he slid his hand around her waist.

Even through the fabric of her dress, he could feel the gentle heat radiating from her body, sending a shiver of excitement down his spine.

They were engulfed by the music, its pulsating beat synchronizing with the rhythm of the crowd. Her movements were a display of elegance as Mira synchronized her steps with the rhythm.

Mira's dress, a cascade of shimmering fabric, swayed with each step she took. The glow of the ballroom lights reflected off the material, creating a subtle iridescence. As Erik's hands rested on her waist, he could sense the warmth of her presence, a comforting contrast to the cool air of the room.

Erik, observing her actions, followed her lead, displaying a reserved yet surprisingly fluid movement. Mira's steps were precise yet effortless, her every move a testament to grace and poise. Together, they moved as one, perfectly in sync with the music and each other.

Around them, the dance floor was a kaleidoscope of color and movement. Other couples swirled and twirled in time to the music, their laughter and conversation blending into a harmonious backdrop. The rhythm of the music seemed to pulse through the very air, its beats echoing in their movements.

The clamor of the party, the clinking of glasses, the murmur of voices—all of it receded into the background. In this moment, in the whirl of dance and music, Erik and Mira were the only two people in the room, absorbed in the magic of their dance.

The captivating presence of Mira was felt by everyone as she danced. With her eyelids shutting softly, she completely gave in to the captivating beat of the music, her countenance radiating a sense of calmness and pure happiness.

The slightest motion they made had a profound effect on her hair, causing it to swirl around her in a captivating manner reminiscent of silken waves in an invisible ocean.

The gentle glow of the soft lighting in the ballroom beautifully illuminated her features, accentuating the contours of her face. With every movement she made, the delicate strands of her hair glimmered and reflected the light, giving her an enchanting and otherworldly presence.

In that moment, Erik, unable to resist, became captivated by her exquisite beauty. His deepest desire was to see her radiant expression of joy, unhindered by any obstacles, and to be able to look into her eyes directly, free from the hindrance of his mask.

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The moment the song ended, the dancers erupted into an enthusiastic applause, creating a thunderous sound. With a gentle flutter, Mira's eyelids lifted, revealing her eyes, which locked onto Erik's masked face.



"Thank you for the dance," she said.

Erik nodded in acknowledgement, his own emotions intertwining into a complex blend of both joy and introspection. "It was a pleasure," he said. His voice was an unyielding facade to the rampant thoughts in his mind.

Out of nowhere, Noah sent a telepathic message that pierced through his mind, causing him to snap out of his thoughts and become alert.

<Master! > Noah said agitated.

<What's going on? > Erik was concerned. If Noah reached to him, it meant David Miller was indeed creating trouble.

<Miller is causing a scene on the balcony. He's likely intoxicated, > Noah said. His mental voice was laced with a sense of urgency.

<I'm on my way. >

As he separated himself from Mira, he couldn't help but let his hand remain connected to hers for an extended moment.

"I have to handle something," he said. With her gaze fixed on him, Mira raised her eyes and began searching his masked face, seeking any signs or indications. As she felt the seriousness in his voice, she nodded and removed her hand from his.

As he made his way through the crowd, Erik's steps were deliberate and filled with purpose, showcasing his confidence. The night had been going so well, and he couldn't afford a scandal, especially not tonight.

#### Chapter 705: The Party (4)

Erik's gaze met David Miller's as he emerged onto the balcony. David, exuding a rugged aura, stood tall, his stature commanding attention. His piercing blue eyes, intense and unwavering, conveyed a silent challenge. The lines in his grizzled beard hinted at a life of experience, suggesting he was in his late 40s.

David's attire, much like his well-known reputation, was a blend of faded elegance and wear. The suit, though once pristine, now bore signs of wear and age, the fabric slightly frayed at the edges, telling its own story of a past filled with both triumphs and hardships.

Erik couldn't ignore the fact that David's disruptive actions were causing the atmosphere to become strained. The young man's mere presence had a commanding effect on the space, as his movements and demeanor disrupted the once serene ambiance of the balcony.

As the onlookers discreetly shifted their attention towards the unfolding scene, the air around them felt charged and heavy with unspoken tension.

"Enough of this nonsense, Miller," Erik said. If looks could kill, at that moment, David Miller would be a dead man.

David turned to face him, a sarcastic grin stretching across his face. "Ah, the man of the hour. Erik Kay, how delightful," he said. The cutting scorn in his voice pierced through the stillness of the night, accompanied by a faint odor of alcohol escaping his mouth.

"If you continue to behave like this, you'll be escorted out," Erik's tone was serious. He warned the man, but he knew that would not be enough to deter him.

"My apologies," David said. His voice was dripping with insincerity. "I wouldn't want to ruin your special night."

David's eyes narrowed, and the man changed the subject. "You must be quite pleased with yourself, given your guild's successes and all. I bet you also did that on purpose just to piss me off."

Erik's eyes, hidden behind his mask, remained inscrutable. "What are you talking about?"

"Don't play coy with me, Kay," David said. "You've been aiming to replace the Border Wolves since you set foot in this city."

Erik felt a surge of annoyance but kept his composure. "I'm not in competition with anyone. I'm here to do what's best for my guild and the people who rely on me."

David chuckled darkly. "Ah, the altruistic leader act. How charming."

"I don't have to explain myself to you, Miller," Erik's voice was now tinged with a growing impatience. "And I'm quickly losing my patience with this conversation."

David's eyes narrowed, sensing the tension. "Your cocky attitude says it all. Mayor Bonner really wants to hand over the task of protecting the city's border to your guild."

Erik's eyes, hidden behind his mask, flickered with a mixture of surprise and realization.

<So, this was what Mayor Bonner wanted to talk about, uh? >

"I know nothing about that," Erik said. "But it seems you're more informed about my affairs than I am."

David smirked, a look of self-satisfaction crossing his face. "Just keeping an ear to the ground, Kay. It's how I've survived this long."

"If you're done spreading rumors, I suggest you leave. You're not contributing anything positive to this event."

David looked at Erik for a long moment, as if measuring him up. "Fine." The man's voice was tinged with hostility. "But don't think this is the end, Kay. You may have won the crowd, but you haven't won the war."

As David Miller discarded his wine, the liquid cascaded onto the floor, splattering in a careless display of disregard.

He then pivoted to leave, his departure marked by an unsteady gait. The effects of the alcohol were clear in his uneven steps, yet he attempted to maintain a semblance of composure.

His demeanor exuded a forced air of superiority, as if trying to project an image of being above everyone else present despite his clear inebriation.

Erik observed as Miller made his way through the bustling crowd. As Miller took each step, the onlookers couldn't help but have their eyes fixed on him, their expressions revealing a blend of curiosity and disapproval.

Guests exchanged glances and subtle nods, their whispers fluttering through the air as they discussed the altercation.

The atmosphere, previously light and convivial, had shifted noticeably. The balcony, once filled with the pleasant hum of conversation and laughter, now resonated with an indistinct murmur of speculation and intrigue, all centered on the scene that had just unfolded.

The balcony had attracted the attention of a select few guests, who, driven by their own curiosity, had gathered there, their eyes wide with inquisitiveness and their faces mirroring varying degrees of concern and fascination.

The atmosphere was thick with tension, and Erik could feel the weight of their collective gaze, even though his own eyes were hidden behind his mask.

Murmurs rippled through the small crowd. "Did you hear what Miller said? Something about the city's border," one woman said to her companion, her eyes still fixed on Erik.

"Yeah, and what's this about Mayor Bonner wanting to give that task to Kay's guild? Is that even possible?" a man in a tailored suit asked, skepticism lining his voice.

"I don't know, but if it's true, it's a big deal. The Border Wolves have been in charge of defending the city for years."

With amusement shining in her wide eyes, a younger woman leaned in closer to her group. "Do you think there's going to be a guild war or something? Miller looked furious."

It was during that specific moment that Erik had a complete realization and understanding that the individuals surrounding him were, in fact, sharks.

Despite his reservations about the party attendees and his lack of prior acquaintance with them, he entertained the possibility that his initial judgment could have been flawed.

However, the things that these individuals were saying, their body language and the amusement clear on their faces as they witnessed the short-lived altercation, all showed that their true intention was to claim a portion of Erik's achievements.

On the balcony, Erik stood tall, his eyes veiled by the mask, yet his stance exuded an undeniable sense of power. Erik, feeling irritated by the foolish behavior of the other individuals, released a substantial amount of mana into the atmosphere, resulting in massive ripples that frightened the onlookers, causing them to withdraw to the safety of indoors.

While Noah approached him, their telepathic link continued to be active, providing a silent channel of communication that allowed them to converse without the intrusion of the surrounding crowd.

<Do you want to deal with David Miller? > Noah's voice echoed in Erik's mind.

Erik paused for a moment, contemplating his options. <Not today, > he telepathically said, <but I have another idea. Our guild is already taking over the most important and lucrative jobs from the Border Wolves. Maybe it's time to speed up the process. Miller used to be a good man, but power, money, and sex have corrupted him.

We can use that against him, spread some rumors, tarnish his already faltering reputation. >

Noah absorbed Erik's words, his mind already racing with potential plans. <Do you want to take care of this now? > he asked.

<Yes, > Erik said, <but there's something else. I'm planning to leave the city for a while, to train in isolation. I need you to handle this Miller situation and take care of the guild in my absence. >

<Understood. I'll make sure everything runs smoothly while you're away. > Noah tried to sound as professional as he could while saying that. Erik's relying on him made him feel proud.

When Erik glanced at Noah, it was clear his masked face did not reveal any emotions. However, if his eyes were visible, they would have displayed a combination of gratitude and trust. <I know you will. You're the only one I can entrust with this. >

While departing from the balcony, Erik was struck by the overwhelming weight of the difficulties that loomed in his future.

The guild's ongoing rivalry with Miller, coupled with the unexpected proposition from Mayor Bonner, created a complex and intricate situation, resembling a tangled web of opportunities and threats.

Despite this, his attention was now fixed on the immediate future, particularly on the seclusion that he would soon face and the training that would undeniably bolster his capabilities.

As he turned to leave, he had the comforting assurance that he was entrusting his guild, his dreams, and his challenges into capable hands.

Noah observed Erik vanishing into the crowd, his presence both merging with and distinguishing itself from the surroundings, an enigmatic contradiction that perfectly represented his multifaceted character - a leader, a warrior, a visionary.

As the clone turned his gaze towards the gathered crowd, thoughts of strategy and preparation filled his mind, and a strong sense of determination took shape.

The groundwork was already laid by Erik, and now it was his responsibility to continue building on it. The guild would prosper, Miller would be dealt with, and when Erik returned, he would come back to a legacy in the making.

#### Chapter 706: Departure

Two days went by after Noah's party. The next day, Erik found himself seated in Mayor Bonner's lavishly decorated office, facing her. As she laid out her proposal, her sharp and calculating eyes met his masked gaze. "I'd like your guild to take over the city's defenses."

The conversation progressed so quickly that it felt like it was over before it even began. Both the Mayor and Erik were individuals who did not appreciate beating around the bush. Their main priority was to be efficient and thorough, so they strived to work at a fast pace, overlooking nothing.

Their conversation unfolded with a brisk efficiency, each word and gesture aimed like a well-placed chess move.

The Mayor, was a woman whose shrewdness was as clear as her well-crafted words, navigated the dialogue with the precision of a seasoned diplomat.

Her eyes, sharp and calculating, seemed to dance with a cunning spark as she spoke. Erik, attuned to the subtleties of her demeanor, could not help but notice how her gaze seemed to assess and dissect each of his responses, her mind always several steps ahead.

Despite their shared appreciation for directness, Erik couldn't shake off the feeling that beneath her straightforward exterior lay layers of strategic thinking, each sentence a calculated play in the grand game of politics and power.

Erik scrutinized the contract with a keen eye, searching for any hidden clauses or unfavorable terms. He expected to find something amiss, something that might be a drawback.

Yet, as he delved deeper into the document, his surprise grew. Page after page, the terms were simple, fair, and free of any negative aspects.

This unexpected discovery left Erik taken aback. He had braced himself for a catch, a twist in the fine print that would demand caution, but it simply wasn't there.

The realization that the contract was genuinely straightforward, with no hidden traps or disadvantages, was a rare and unforeseen outcome for Erik, who was accustomed to navigating more treacherous waters in his dealings.

"I accept your offer, Mayor. However, you'll need to coordinate the details with my right-hand man, Noah."

The Mayor's smile, thin and almost predatory, spread across her face. "Very well. I'll make sure everything runs smoothly on our end."

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Because of the Mayor's generous financial support, Erik wasted no time in implementing his new plans. The purpose of the emergency meeting was to outline the expansion of their operations, so he had called Noah and his other clones to attend.

He gave explicit instructions to expand their operations. His orders included increasing the fleet of vehicles, recruiting additional members, and boosting weapon production. His aim was clear: he intended to elevate the guild to a higher level of operation and influence.

Noah and the clones had wasted no time, diving headlong into the logistical maze that such an expansion entailed. His guild was growing and evolving, and he was the architect of that transformation.

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Erik stood at the entrance of his guild headquarters, his backpack slung over his shoulder and his beloved Flyssa sword safely sheathed by his side. Among the items he had on were a mask, a long coat, and winter clothes.

No sooner had Erik left the guild's main building than he caught sight of Mira, who was positioned next to a luxurious and stylish limousine. She looked at his masked face, and in the depths of her gaze, he could discern a blend of concern and longing.

As he drew nearer, she closed the distance that separated them and enveloped him in a warm embrace, her arms encircling him tightly.

"Do you really have to go?" she asked. She was worried. Erik announced he was going to train in the White Desert, alone at that. She knew he could defend himself even there, but it was still a very dangerous place.

"I have to," Erik said. He was feeling a swirl of emotions, but he knew he had to do that. Everything he had done until now was to have the guild backing him. He needed soldiers, he needed weapons. All with the single purpose of then going to investigate the blackguards.

"But why?" Her eyes scoured his masked face for answers, like a detective examining a cryptic puzzle.

"I need to train," was all he said, his tone final.

Mira let out a sigh of frustration, causing her shoulders to droop a little. "I know you're strong, Erik, but venturing outside the city is risky, even for you."

His eyes concealed by the mask, Erik locked his gaze with hers, his eyes reflecting a strong sense of resolve. "Don't worry, Mira. I'll be fine."



Despite Mira's protests and attempts to dissuade him, Erik remained steadfast in his decision to go. In the end, she was convinced by something in his voice or his body language. After a moment, she nodded and loosened her grip on the embrace. "Alright, just...be careful, okay?"

Erik nodded, his hand touching hers, like a leaf drifting onto the surface of a still pond, sealing his promise. "I will."

After exchanging their goodbyes, Erik turned around and made his way into the luxurious limousine.

While settling into the plush seat, his gaze shifted towards the window, where he caught sight of Mira standing there, her figure receding into the distance as the car lifted off the ground and began its ascent towards the entrance of the city.

As the limousine glided through the air, the view of the city's familiar skyline grew smaller and smaller, gradually fading into the distance.

With a slight recline, Erik's focus shifted towards the imminent training that lay ahead, the obstacles he expected, and the individual he was determined to evolve into.

Deep within the corners of his thoughts, the lasting image of Mira's worried expression. Separating from her didn't make him feel good.

He could have acted differently, but Mira's expression unnerved him, reminding him of Amber. He wondered if Amber had shown a similar face upon hearing of his supposed demise.

His hope lingered on the clue he left behind that Amber and the others would discover his survival, confirming he was still very much alive.

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With a smooth landing, Erik's opulent limousine made its way to the entrance of the city's prestigious gate mall, leaving onlookers in awe.

When the car door swung open, the young man emerged and found himself surrounded by a chaotic symphony of diverse sounds permeating the atmosphere.

In a constant and chaotic flow, people from all walks of life moved, their voices blending together into a symphony of human activity.

The vendors hawked their wares with enthusiasm, shouting over one another to entice customers. With their bags filled with the day's acquisitions, the shoppers haggled, argued, and laughed amongst themselves.

The delightful aromas from the food stalls filled the air, creating a tantalizing mix with the less desirable smells that are inevitable in such a crowded place.

Above everything else, the hum of machinery from the gate's defensive systems served as a constant reminder of the structure's main purpose: safeguarding the city from any external threats.

Erik made his way through the bustling crowd, his unwavering focus directed towards the towering doors that served as the exit point. Moving with urgency, he took long and purposeful strides that showed a clear sense of determination.

The people in the crowd seemed to have a sense of his intent and moved apart, creating a small path for him to pass through.

Before stepping through the doors, he couldn't resist the urge to cast one last look over his shoulder at the hive of activity he was leaving behind.

After pausing for a moment, he inhaled, mustered his resolve, and passed through the gate, embarking on a journey into the realm beyond.

The moment Erik set foot outside, he wasted no time and began sprinting. The stark contrast between the bustling gate mall, filled with people and activity, and the vast expanse of muted land that stretched out in front of him was incredibly jarring.

No more was the sounds of commerce and conversation. Instead, the rustling of the few leaves stubbornly clinging to the trees and the distant calls of the winter wildlife filled the air.

Erik bravely ventured into the forest, feeling as if the towering trees, resembling silent giants draped in the icy embrace of winter, surrounded and enveloped him entirely.

The trees stood tall with their towering trunks and branches, some bearing the weight of the snow, and created a realm that seemed otherworldly, separate from the chaos of human life.

Erik was enveloped by a sense of freedom, as crisp and invigorating as the winter air, which beckoned him to let go of the complexities of his life, much like leaves falling from trees in autumn.

As he took each step forward, the city and its bustling gate-mall slowly slipped away from his minds, like the fading glow of the winter sun.

With each step, Erik ventured deeper into the heart of the forest, feeling the frosty air sharpen his senses and embracing the challenges and discoveries that lay hidden beneath the forest veil.

Chapter 707: First day in the wilderness

As far as the eye could see, the forest transformed into a silent opera of winter, a beautiful expanse covered in frost.

With their bark twisted and worn by the elements over countless years, the towering trees stood tall. Their skeletal canopies serving as a dramatic juxtaposition to the dull, overcast sky.

With the occasional whiff of pine, the air was crisp and carried the delightful fragrance of frost-kissed earth and dormant foliage.

The biting wind, with its haunting whistle, passed through the barren branches, bringing along a symphony of whispers that revealed ancient secrets and timeless stories.

With an eerie grace, Erik traversed through the frozen expanse, his every step leaving only the faintest trace upon the pristine snow.

His keen eyes darted around, taking in the play of shadows, the fluttering of snowflakes, the subtle shifts in the forest's frozen soundscape. Immersed in the forest, he had synchronized his senses with its rhythm, moving his body at tempo with its pulse.

As he followed his path, he encountered several Thaid, their monstrous forms looming in the undergrowth or lurking among the trees.

He disregarded them, not paying them any attention. They were beneath his notice. His targets were elsewhere. He saw no reason to slaughter those weak monsters, as their brain crystal powers held no value or advantage for him.

Beneath layers of winter gear, Erik's muscles were tightly wound springs, ready to unleash their power. His presence exuded a sense of danger, and his every move revealed his predatory nature, proving his mastery of hunting.

Throughout his run, he kept his mind concentrated, his thoughts aligned with his sole purpose - that being to boost his energy statistic and form additional neural links.

Throughout his journey, he encountered a multitude of winter landscapes. They ranged from dense thickets where sunlight struggled to break through, to open glades illuminated by a serene, silvery light. As he made his way, he crossed frozen brooks and maneuvered through snow-laden inclines.

Over time, he finally found himself in a clearing where ethereal beams of sunlight illuminated the space. Here, the air was filled with a refreshing quality that seemed to be infused with an invigorating energy, causing a tingling sensation in his senses.

In the freezing cold, he exhaled, and his breath transformed into a fog, a sign of the preparation he was making for what awaited him.

The clearing, with its untouched winter landscape, resembled a pristine canvas that had not been touched by any Thaid. At the edge, Erik stood tall, his body casting a stretched-out shadow that reached across the snowy ground.

After an entire day of nonstop movement, he made the executive decision to take a break as the sun began its descent.

After unslung his backpack, he let it fall onto the snow, creating a muffled thud. As the cold air enveloped him, his breath formed a misty fog, diverting his focus towards the task that lay before him. "Time to set up camp"

Erik reached into his mind, tapping into his Plant Master brain crystal power. As he stood there, he couldn't help but feel the energy coursing through him. It was a pulsating rhythm that seemed in sync with the life force of the surrounding forest.

A dome made up of branches and twigs, intertwined and sprouting from the frozen earth, emerged with their bark still keeping its green color despite the winter chill.

The structure grew at an astonishing pace. It contorted and winded until it took shape as a robust wooden shelter that provided ample space for him to be accommodated.

The sight of the wooden dome taking form left Erik in awe as he contemplated the extent of his own power. "Fantastic." A hint of satisfaction crept into his voice. "But there's more to be done."

Once he finished with the task at hand, he shifted his focus to the precious Luminara Serpensis seeds stored in his pack. These extraordinary plants had the ability to repel Thaid's. The energy they emanated was unpleasant to the monsters once they sprouted.

Erik didn't need them for protection. His skill set in self-defense surpassed what was necessary, making him more than capable of defending himself. However, his key priority was to guarantee uninterrupted rest and training, free from the presence of unwanted guests.

Erik stood against the backdrop of his newly formed shelter. He held a handful of seeds in his hand. With a steady motion, he scattered them across the frozen ground.

The soil, hardened by the winter's cold, presented a challenge. Determined, Erik used the sole of his boot to press each seed into the earth. He moved from one spot to the next, ensuring that no seed lay atop the frostbitten ground, vulnerable to the elements.

As he worked, Erik could feel the resistance of the icy soil against his boots. He applied gentle but firm pressure, coaxing the seeds into the shallow indentations he created. His breath visible in the cold air, he continued this dance of survival—a push against nature, a plea for growth.

With each seed nestled into its cold bed, Erik stepped back to survey his work. The shelter stood silent behind him, a witness to this minor act of hope in the heart of winter. The seeds, now hidden beneath the soil's frosty crust, held the promise of life, awaiting the warmth of spring to awaken.

Once again, he tapped into his Plant Master power and used it to encourage the seeds to sprout and flourish.

In a moment that defied the pace of nature, the transformation unfolded. The slender shoots, embodying resilience and vitality, pierced through the thick, white blanket of snow with an almost magical swiftness.

These shoots gained strength and stature. They ascended towards the sky, growing into tall, majestic plants. Each plant was adorned with leaves that radiated a soft, luminescent glow.

The glow bathed Erik's shelter in a serene, otherworldly aura. It was as if the plants harnessed the very essence of the waning sun.

The glowing plant stood resilient against the frosty breeze, its leaves shimmering and dancing as if mocking the winter's chill. Each sway and flutter was like a display of defiance, showcasing a spectacle akin to an unyielding warrior standing tall amidst a battlefield of snow and ice, embodying natural beauty and wonder.

The air filled with their unique aroma, and it started emanating energy that kept the monsters away.

Erik couldn't help but chuckle as he surveyed his handiwork. "Not bad for a day's work," he said. "A place to rest in the heart of this icy wilderness."

After taking the steps to secure and protect his shelter, Erik was able to find some much-needed relaxation. Leaving behind his footprints on the snow-covered ground, he made his way into the wooden dome. Inside, shielded from the biting wind, he prepared to rest and train, ready for whatever tomorrow might bring.

The scent inside the dome was a captivating combination of the fresh wood and the distinct, spicy fragrance emitted by the musk that grew on it.

The smell was very comforting, creating an atmosphere of safety and tranquility in the space. Before he began his training, Erik took a moment to breathe in the surroundings and let them fill his senses.

With his back straight and his legs crossed in a meditative pose, he settled down in the center of the dome. After closing his eyes, he focused on his breath, taking a deep inhale and releasing all the stress from his body.

Just as challenging as any physical workout, he was on the verge of embarking on a mental journey.

"Alright, time to forge some new neural links."

The process started smoothly, with no complications. To stimulate the formation of new neural connections, Erik had to delve deep into his consciousness. It was a challenging task that required intense focus and mental endurance.

The process required him to envision the creation of these bridge-like links, allowing them to spring into existence within his imagination.

The first thing he did was clear his mind, attempting to push aside any thoughts or distractions that might hinder his focus.

After that, he directed all his attention towards achieving his goal. In his mind, he visualized these threads of energy as radiant beams that intertwined. The end goal was to build a bridge that linked his brain crystal with his brain.

As Erik delved deeper into his consciousness, he lost track of time. He could feel the energy pulsing within him, could see the glowing threads in his mind's eye. Despite his best endeavors, he was unsuccessful in forming any additional links. He didn't let frustration take over him. Patience and perseverance were essential throughout this intricate process.

"Guess it's not happening today." He surrendered after what felt like hours. As his eyes fluttered open, a sigh slipped past his lips. His face exhibited no traces of disappointment, but rather a strong sense of determination. "Tomorrow is another day," he said. He made a promise to himself to try again.

Chapter 708: Trouble back home

The next day, Erik was greeted by a fresh blanket of snow. All sounds seemed to be muffled in the stillness. Outside, the snow was falling heavily, covering the landscape in a beautiful, uniform coat of white.

<This will make travelling harder...>

Focused on his aim, Erik had his sights set on the White Desert and was determined to reach it as swiftly as possible. Now that he was no longer hindered by inexperienced individuals in his guild and, with the advantage of his quick footwork, he was certain that he could complete the journey without delay.

Picking a Luminara Serpensis flower became Erik's top priority as he emerged from the dome. With great care, he gently placed it inside a bottle that was filled to the brim with water, ensuring its preservation and ability to survive even when removed from its natural habitat on the ground.

After securing the flower, Erik sat down to enjoy a brief breakfast. Lost in deep thought, he savored each bite of his rations while his eyes remained fixed on the snowy expanse that lay just beyond the shelter he sought refuge in.

Up until now, he didn't find Thaid's worth killing, and his travel went on expedited. However, he had already planned some ideas in his mind for the things he wanted to do once he finally reached the White Desert.

The top priority was finding a quicker method of transportation, and he realized there was something he could accomplish with his abilities. However, before anything else, his top priority was to find a secure location where he could carry out his plan.

After finishing breakfast, Erik stood up and brushed off the snow that had gathered on his clothes. With a determined look in his eyes, he hefted his backpack onto his shoulders, the sound of zippers and buckles echoing in the silence, and took one last look at his temporary shelter, its feeble existence a reminder of the harsh conditions he was about to face in the snowstorm.

As Erik continued to make his way through the snow, his thoughts shifted to what lay in store for him once he reached the White Desert. There were not just flying Thaid's present at the location, but there were also ones that remained hidden beneath the sand, patiently waiting for unsuspecting prey. Fear did not grip Erik for them.



In fact, he relished the challenge they presented, but the flying Thaid's were going to be a tough fight.

"Who knows what I'll find this time?" He broke the silence of his solitary journey.

"With the Aerokinesis brain crystal power, I shouldn't have problems killing them, but..." His thoughts drifted to a very concerning matter. "My mana is too fucking low..."

That was the reason Erik went to the White desert. In order to increase his mana, he needed to level up as much as he could. The young man was determined to discover the truth about Uncle Benjamin and the Blackguards, aware that by doing so, he would make enemies out of them.

If the strength attributed to them by the world was accurate, it would be crucial not to underestimate the task at hand and depend on his physical abilities alone. He needed more power.

"I wonder how they'll like a taste of their own medicine." A smile crept up on his face at the thought. He pictured himself using the Thaid's own tactics against them.

The Aerokinesis power would allow him to attack from a distance, making the only advantage these beasts held against humans, their ability to fly useless.

It was a skill that would prove useful to him against flying opponents.

"I wish I had gotten this sooner. If I did, I would have claimed this as my brain crystal power in Etrium, not Nathaniel's power."

It wasn't like the latter wasn't a good power. Nathaniel was bound to get cuddled by the army once he enlisted, and he was also going to have an easy life. The ability also allowed to fight mid range, but it was still nothing compared to the power of making wind blades out of the air.

Despite the adverse weather and the extensive distance he had to travel, Erik experienced a strong sense of anticipation. Although the White Desert was known for its harsh and unforgiving nature, it was also viewed as a training ground abundant with opportunities for those courageous enough to grasp them.

As Erik disappeared into the snowstorm, leaving behind his makeshift shelter and the glowing Luminara Serpensis plants, he felt a sense of excitement bubbling within him.

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Following an arduous journey of half a day, during which he traversed vast distances, Erik's attention was drawn to a discernible transformation in the landscape.

As we ventured deeper into the forest, we noticed a gradual transformation in the vegetation, which was slowly being replaced by a more desolate terrain characterized by jagged rocks and scarce shrubs scattered throughout the landscape.

Despite the cold temperatures, the trees remained, though their numbers decreased.

"I'm getting closer." His gaze swept over the changing scenery. The Thaid's he had encountered during his journey were becoming formidable, their presence serving as a clear sign he was getting closer to the White Desert.

As he continued his journey, his attention was drawn to something in the distance, a flicker of movement. A convoy of armored cars was making its way across the barren landscape, toward Testrovs's Rest's - the city he had left behind. Curiosity sparked, Erik hastened his steps, sprinting towards the convoy.

"Who would be out here, this close to the White Desert?" The region was famous for its dangerous Thaid's, and it required a particular bravery - or perhaps foolishness - to approach them.

Erik slowly edged closer to the convoy, being mindful not to startle them or bring any unwanted attention to himself.

He squinted, he strained his eyes to discern any distinguishing features that could identify these travelers.

As he neared, he noticed a shiny emblem on one of the cars that immediately drew his attention.

As he recognized the symbol, his heart skipped a beat, pounding in his chest. The emblem of the Band of Giants, the most renowned and powerful mercenary guild in the nation, was prominently displayed. Surprise filled Erik's eyes, causing them to widen.

<What are they doing here, so close to the White Desert and heading towards Testrovsc's Rest? >

Stunned, Erik halted in his tracks, his mind flooded with a whirlwind of unanswered questions. The Band of Giants' presence was no small matter. They were legendary figures, their name echoing across distant lands. Their arrival could mean a significant event was unfolding back in the city.

"Two days," Erik said to himself. "I've been away for two days, and things are already happening." He felt a pang of frustration. Leaving Testrovsc's Rest to train and improve himself, it felt as if he was disconnected from important events happening around him.

As he gazed at the convoy, it diminished into a mere speck on the horizon. He could follow them to the city and uncover the truth behind the commotion.

But he had a mission, a purpose that consumed his thoughts and drove him forward. His purpose was to reach the White Desert, not get involved in Testrovsc's rest affairs. His clones were bound to take care of it if it involved his people.

However, an undercurrent of unease continued to gnaw at him. The Band of Giants didn't move without reason. Their presence in this area was a clear sign that something significant was happening or about to happen.

Erik let out a heavy sigh as he turned his gaze away from the disappearing convoy. With determination in his heart, he pressed on, knowing he had a destination to reach. With no time to spare, distractions or detours were out of the question.

Seeing the Band of Giants, and the unease it gave him, prompted Erik to check his status.

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[Host Information]

NAME: Erik Romano

AGE: 18

POWER LEVEL: 378

SYSTEM LEVEL: 46

EXPERIENCE: 95960/115600

DNA POINTS: 21150

HEALTH: 3440/3440

MANA: 3370/3370

{Attributes}

STRENGTH: 178

INTELLIGENCE: 220

DEXTERITY: 158

ENERGY: 167

Available Attributes points: 0

{Powers}

## [Biological Super Computer Powers]

### -Brain Crystal Manipulation

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

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

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

- (LOCKED)

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

-(LOCKED)

### -DNA Manipulation

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

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

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

- (LOCKED)

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

-(LOCKED)

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

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

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

[Host's Powers]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AEROKYNESIS: Cσ3A-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 709: Arrival

After the convoy disappeared over the horizon, Erik remained kept going forward. He had many thoughts in mind.

"Could there be a threat to the city?" His gaze glancing back to the spot where the convoy had vanished. "Or perhaps a lucrative job that's drawn them out here?" The possibilities were endless, and without more information, he could only guess. He sighed.

Erik grabbed his radio, urgency etched on his face. He adjusted the dial, attempting to establish a connection with Noah and the other clones.

His fingers worked swiftly, rotating the knob back and forth, seeking a clear signal. Static crackled through the speaker with each twist, a cacophony of white noise filling the air.

He pressed the device closer to his ear, listening for any sign of a response. He called out into the radio, his voice tinged with concern, "Noah, can you hear me? Respond, please." Silence hung heavy on the other end, the usual buzz of communication eerily absent.

Erik's brow furrowed in frustration and worry. He tapped the radio, hoping to coax it into life, his actions growing more frantic with each passing second. The lack of response from Noah and the clones was unsettling, leaving Erik with a growing sense of unease about their welfare.

He continued to try different frequencies, his persistence undeterred by the silence. Each attempt was met with the same lack of success, the silence from the radio speaking volumes about the situation at hand.

"Fuck... Something is really going on back in the city..."



Despite the circumstances, he found himself in a situation where he had no control, and if he were to return to the city, it would only result in squandering a valuable opportunity.

Considering all the effort he put into securing his freedom for the sole purpose of being able to go training, it would be such a shame to let this opportunity slip away, unused.

"Speculations won't get me anywhere. I'll find out what's going on in Testrovsc's Rest as soon as I get back."

"But for now," he said, his breath forming small clouds in the cold air as he picked up speed, "I have my own things to do."

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After half a day of relentless travel, Erik finally reached the outskirts of the White Desert. The transition from the sparse vegetation to the vast expanse of white sand was abrupt. The sand dunes, as white as snow, stretched out as far as the eye could see, undulating like waves frozen in time.

"I'm finally back here." He stood at the edge of the first dune, his eyes scanning the horizon.

The desert stretched out before him, a vast expanse of endless dunes and shimmering heat.

Its beauty lay in the unyielding terrain, where the golden sands met the azure sky in a seamless horizon.

The sun blazed overhead, casting deep shadows in the hollows of the dunes.

Yet, for all its mesmerizing beauty, the desert was a ruthless environment. The scorching heat during the day could sap the strength of even the hardest traveler, while the nights brought a biting cold that crept into the bones. The air was dry, leaving a persistent thirst that was hard to quench.

Mirages shimmered on the horizon, teasing with illusions of water that were never there. The desert was a place of survival, where every drop of water was precious, and every step was a calculation against the unyielding elements.

Erik brought with him rations, but also seeds, so that he could at least eat some vegetables.

His Plant Master brain crystal power was of such magnitude that it had a profound influence on everything around him, and he had no concerns about lacking food. The problem was finding a shelter.

Since he had been here before, he already knew that there were none available. No cave, no rock formation, no nothing. In addition, it was risky to stay on the sand, especially during his sleep, as there was always the possibility of being ambushed.

The system would warn him, but if the Thaid attacked him was strong, or worse, flying, he could put his life at risk. He was not deterred by this setback and came up with a straightforward solution.

He brought along seeds that possessed the remarkable ability to survive in desert environments, and he intended to use them in building a shelter.

He looked up at the sky, the clear blue expanse dotted with the silhouettes of flying Thaid.

They were a common sight in this part of the world, their presence a constant reminder of how insignificant were humans in this monster-laden world.

"Seems like they're waiting for me," Erik said with a wry smile, his gaze fixed on the circling Thaid. He knew all too well how dangerous they could be. His previous encounters with them had been challenging, to say the least.

As he stepped onto the white sand, it shifted beneath his weight. The desert was a harsh mistress, its beauty hiding deadly threats. Erik knew he would have to tread carefully.

"Same old White Desert." He looked at the sky again, then at the sand. "Let's get to work..."

Wasting no time, Erik got straight to work. He had something in mind that he wanted to do, and it would serve two purposes at once: providing shelter and attracting Thaid.

With the second, the monsters would go to him, and he would have nothing to do, aside from killing.

However, he still needed to tread carefully. Who knew what monsters roamed around that no one knew about and that could be hard to kill?

Besides, he was well aware of his shortcomings when it came to mana and thaids with ranged brain crystal powers were still very dangerous.

"I need to level up." His gaze fixed on the circling Thaids in the distant sky. "The more mana I get, the better chance I stand against those with elemental and ranged powers later."

Though his main reason for being there was to train, he had other motives as well. Besides his primary goal, he was also on a mission to find the Thaid, who had destroyed the cargo plane he had been assigned to locate previously.

The reason behind his actions was not solely driven by his desire for the brain crystal power, but also by his intention to neutralize a potential threat or gather valuable information about it.

With a deliberate motion, Erik extended his hand towards his pocket, skillfully retrieving a small seed from within.

At first glance, it seemed ordinary, but he was well-informed and knew otherwise. He tossed it onto the ground, watching as it disappeared into the white sand. The start of his plan began at this point.

"Time to make some noise." A determined look appeared in his eyes. Thaids had a reputation for being unable to resist the lure of a commotion, and he knew this well.

The greater the chaos, the stronger their attraction to him would become, and he was planning on changing the landscape.

Erik, having that thought in mind, focused and channeled his mana through the neural links, redirecting it towards his Plant Master Brain crystal power.

While he focused on channeling his mana, an intense surge of energy flowed through his body, establishing a deep connection between him and the seed he had recently sown.

His senses were attuned to the pulsating life force and boundless potential for growth that it possessed. It was a unique sensation, one that reminded him of his connection with these living beings.

"This should get their attention." A hint of amusement was in his voice. He had the awareness that his planned actions would not only attract the Thaidi, but also result in a remarkable spectacle within the human world.

The moment Erik redirected his mana, he witnessed a remarkable reaction from the seed hidden beneath the glistening white sand. It was as though a spark had been ignited, a spark that was exploding into a roaring flame.

At first, the seed quivered with anticipation before erupting from the ground, transforming into a small sprout that grew at a rate never seen before. Erik was pouring all the mana he got into that seed.

As Erik looked on with great fascination, he witnessed the sprout progressively growing thicker, eventually developing into a robust trunk with bark that matched the pure white hue of the sand that surrounded it.

The synchronization of his own heartbeat with the pulsating life force of the tree was a testament to the deep connection they shared.

As time went on, the trunk of the tree grew taller and thicker, with its girth expanding at a rapid pace. The branches of the tree emerged from it, extending in various directions, resembling the massive arms of a colossal creature.

The branches, which were thick and sturdy, had the capacity to support the weight of multiple grown men, but they quickly became capable of holding more, of holding giants.

As Erik watched, the tree continued to grow, its height increasing by leaps and bounds.

Chapter 710: The Tree

The growth of the tree was relentless, only coming to a halt when it had achieved an impressive height of 100 meters. The towering structure stood tall above the expansive desert, with its branches extending and casting elongated shadows over the pristine white sand.

As the wind blew, the leaves of the tree rustled, generating a melody that resonated through the entire desert.

Erik's gaze shifted upward towards the towering tree, and as he did so, he felt an overwhelming sense of satisfaction engulf him. The task had been successfully completed.

He had nurtured and cultivated a magnificent tree, one that soared towards the heavens and was bound to capture the interest of every Thaid living nearby.

As the plant grew, Erik could feel his connection with it strengthening. He could feel its life force pulsating in sync with his own heartbeat.

"Let's see how they like this."

A mischievous grin appeared on Erik's face. He realized the actions he was taking would undoubtedly capture the attention of others. However, that would not come only from Thaid, but also from humans. After all, how could a giant tree sprout in the middle of a Thaid infested desert?

With a last surge of mana, Erik watched as the plant erupted from the ground, its branches reaching towards the sky. It was a sight to behold, a manifestation of life amidst the lifeless desert.

"Now." Erik's voice was drained since he almost used all his mana to grow the tree. That wouldn't have been possible in the past, but since Erik knew he was going to need his Plant Master power more than ever, he focused his efforts on making neural links for it, which made it much more mana-efficient.

"Let's see how many Thaid this can attract."

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With keen interest, the Thaidi observed the scene unfolding from the far reaches of the White Desert. With their keen vision specifically suited for finding prey in the desolate environment, they spotted an unexpected anomaly.

A giant tree, its bark as white as the surrounding sand, was sprouting in the middle of the desert. It was an unusual sight, a stark contrast to the barren landscape they were accustomed to.

None of them could ignore the spectacle of the tree's rapid growth. The branches of the tree extended outward, resembling the outstretched arms of a colossal creature, while its leaves danced and made a soft rustling sound in response to the gentle breeze.

The immense size of the structure made it impossible to miss as it stood tall above the desert, serving as a beacon guiding the way.

The Thaidi, intrigued by this unexpected turn of events, made their way towards the tree, with the flying Thaidi being the quickest among them.

Their wings beat against the wind, their bodies streamlined for maximum speed. The sight of such a large tree in the middle of the desert was too enticing to ignore, its presence a clear sign of something out of the ordinary.

The closer they got, the clearer their view of the tree became. With a height that seemed to defy gravity, it reached an astonishing one hundred meters, creating a breathtaking spectacle. Its branches were thick and sturdy, its leaves lush and green despite the climate.

Drawn by curiosity and the promise of something to munch on, the Thaidi marched and flew toward the tree. Their numbers grew as more and more Thaidi joined them, their curiosity piqued by the unusual sight.

From a distance, it looked like a swarm of dark clouds was descending upon the towering tree.

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Even though it was winter in Etrium, the desert defied expectations by being unusually warm, with the sun's rays mercilessly scorching the white sand. However, the tree came to the rescue and provided a much-needed break from the sweltering heat.

Its broad leaves cast long shadows, creating a cool oasis in the middle of the desert. Under the shade, the temperature dropped by a considerable amount. Erik finally got the much-anticipated break from the scorching heat.

His attention was not directed towards these changes. That was simply a lucky event. In order to be fully prepared to stay in the desert, he had to take care of something else first.

Once again, Erik tapped into his mana and channeled it. He specifically aimed his command towards the trunk of the tree this time, instructing it to generate a passage. In response to his command, the tree reacted by shifting its bark and creating a large opening.

Erik stepped into the opening, his eyes taking in the tree's interior. The interior of the space was exactly what he had envisioned, spacious and hollow. It was perfect for what he had in mind.

Taking control of the tree's wood, he skillfully shaped and manipulated it to fulfill his desires. The sides of the trunk were transformed as walls sprouted, creating partitions that formed separate rooms within the hollow space.

He continued to shape the wood, creating furniture from the tree's own substance. Tables, chairs, a bed - everything he would need for his stay in the desert. The wood, like a loyal servant, obeyed his instructions, growing and adapting to his every command.

"This will do."

Erik took a moment to survey his completed work. The inside of the tree had been transformed into a cozy living area, equipped with everything one would need to stay. It was going to be his base of operations in the White Desert, a place where he could rest and prepare for his hunts.

As his eyes scanned the rooms of his new home, Erik couldn't suppress the feeling of contentment that washed over him. He had created something out of nothing, a safe place in the middle of a harsh desert.

With a sense of pride, the young man observed his handiwork as he glanced around the interior of the tree house.

The air inside the room was cool and fresh, creating a striking contrast to the scorching dry heat that enveloped the exterior.

Crafted from the vibrant, living wood of the tree, the walls exuded a gentle energy that pulsed rhythmically.

He moved through the rooms, his fingers trailing along the smooth surfaces of the wooden furniture he'd created.

Each piece was perfectly formed, matching his exact specifications. The bed was enormous and inviting, but it missed something soft on which he could sleep comfortably. A large table stood in what he had designated as the dining area, its surface polished to a mirror finish.

"Perfect." His voice echoed around the wooden walls. But there was no time to bask in the satisfaction of a job well done. He had something to do now. Thaidis to kill.

With one last glance around his new home, Erik stepped back into the opening of the tree. The sunlight outside was harsh after the cool darkness within, but he didn't flinch.

Gazing into the vast expanse of the sky, his eyes caught sight of tiny specks in the distance.

At first glance, they appeared as mere dust particles dancing in the air. But as he focused, it became clear that these were not inanimate specks, but living creatures—flying entities approaching from afar.

Though they were mere dots against the vast canvas of the sky, their steady and purposeful movement betrayed their nature.

These were no ordinary birds or insects; their size, even from such a great distance, suggested something much larger, akin to the size of cows.

Yet, details of their appearance remained elusive, shrouded in the distance that made them appear so minuscule.



These were Thaidi, the flying kind, descending upon his location. Their distant forms, growing more distinct against the sky, brought an unsettling awareness of the impending encounter with these massive airborne creatures.

Not only this place was an anomaly for them, but it was also a potential nesting spot amidst their hunting grounds. If they made a nest here, they wouldn't have to go back to the forest, saving a lot of energy.

"They are a little too many..."

Along with everything else he was observing, Erik also directed his attention to the ground.

Besides the Thaidi flying here, there were also Thaidi traveling by land to reach this destination. Although he couldn't yet distinguish them, there were a multitude of them.

The figures he spotted in the distance were a herd of a particular species of Thaidi, or perhaps members of various other races inhabiting the desert regions banding together. However, because of the distance, he couldn't determine their exact kind.

"But why are they coming in despite the flying Thaidi flying over them? "

However, upon further observation, it became clear that the Thaidi were oblivious to the flying beings. It would be a suicide to come here when those beasts were doing the same.

"Let's hope they kill each other..."

Erik, perhaps, went a bit overboard, considering that battling such many Thaidi simultaneously would pose a significant threat, even for someone as skilled as him. In order to ensure his safety, he needed to pay close attention and play it safe. However, he felt a powerful surge of determination welling up inside him.

"Now I just need to wait."