

## BIOLOGICAL 731

Chapter 731: The mercenaries couldn't care less about civilians.

After much effort, the duo finally reached Caelora city. But they knew they weren't safe yet. The sound of shouts behind them made them turn. Mercenaries streamed out of the building, raising their brain crystal rifles.

"Run!" Erik said. "Get to the streets and disappear. I will find you!"

June hesitated, reluctant to part from Erik. However, he knew his master was right—their only chance of escape depended on him leaving.

He understood that in the current situation, his presence would be more of a liability than a help to Erik due to those rifles even his master had trouble evading.

With a determined nod, June took off running as Erik spun to face the mercenaries to give his clone time.

In the meantime, June charged into the crowded streets, weaving between startled people. People jumped back in surprise, their faces etched with fear and confusion.

The sound of searing energy bolts slicing through the air intensified the panic. One bolt narrowly missed the clone, crackling past with such proximity that the sharp, electric scent of ozone filled the air. This close call heightened the sense of danger among the bystanders.

Nearby, a group of pedestrians shrieked and scattered, trying to distance themselves from the unexpected battleground.

Some stumbled over each other in their haste to escape, while others clutched their belongings, fearing for their safety.

June ducked and dodged, the bolts missing him by inches as the mercenaries at the door kept aiming at him. His heart hammered as he ran with all his strength, the sounds of fighting erupting behind him.

At the last second, June slid behind a stall, a bolt scorching the ground where he'd just been. Not looking back, he turned the corner and kept running, merging into the masses as Erik had instructed.

This was their best option, he told himself. Erik could handle the mercenaries. June had to keep going and make sure their escape succeeded.

While June did all of this, Erik charged forward, weaving through blistering energy bolts. The mercenaries tried to surround him, but Erik was too quick.

He slammed into the first mercenary, knocking his rifle upward. The bolt seared into the sky. Erik crushed the man's windpipe with a savage strike before grabbing the next mercenary's gun and wrenching it from his grasp.

Twisting the rifle like a club, Erik battered two more mercenaries senseless. The others backed up, trying to get distance to fire. But Erik hurled the rifle into one's helmet, then dropped low to sweep another's legs out from under him.

The remaining mercenaries opened fire in a panic. Searing bolts sizzled wildly, several barely missing civilians who cried out in fear.

"Stop shooting! You're going to strike the civilians!"

The mercenaries hesitated, lowering their rifles. Erik seized the opportunity and launched himself at the nearest opponent. He delivered a vicious chop to the man's wrist, knocking his rifle away.

Before the others could react, Erik slipped behind one and locked his arms around his neck in a chokehold.

"Don't resist. I don't want to kill you."

As if that could make the mercenary feel better. The man struggled violently, but went limp within seconds.

Another soldier attacked, disregarding his colleague's safety. Erik ducked under the attack and drove his fist up into the man's jaw.

"If this is how you treat your colleagues, I can't imagine how you treat your friends!" Teeth and blood sprayed as the mercenary collapsed unconscious.

Then someone fired another bolt of energy. Erik felt the heat as a bolt missed his shoulder. He sprang upward, catching the rifle of the nearest mercenary and driving the stock into his faceplate with a crunch.

As the man dropped, Erik pivoted and launched a spinning kick into the next mercenary's chest, hurling him backward into two others. They went down in a heap.

<Fuck! >

Only three mercenaries remained. They fired with desperation, fueling their actions, but Erik slipped through the sizzling bolts like smoke. In a blur, he was upon them, disarming one mercenary with a brutal elbow strike while simultaneously slamming the other's head into the wall.

The last mercenary turned to run. Erik's hand shot out, catching the back of his armor. With irresistible force, he flung the man to the ground, then stomped on his helmet until he lay still.

As he was done, Erik surveyed the groaning and unconscious mercenaries around him. The fight was over. He had to find June and get to safety before more arrived.

As he prepared to leave, a shimmer of light captured his attention. Around the place of the just concluded skirmish, a crowd had gathered, each person holding up a device. He realized they were recording the fight, capturing every move on their phones and tablets.

<Motherfuckers! >

Erik noticed the characteristics of the bystanders. They were predominantly young, some barely out of their teens, their faces reflecting a mixture of excitement and awe due to the fight, and likely because of Erik's own fame throughout Etrium.

A few wore university logos on their clothing, suggesting they were students. Their hands, clutching smartphones and tablets, trembled.

Among them were young professionals, their office attire disheveled from rushing to witness the spectacle. Their expressions bore a blend of concern and fascination.

Erik froze, struck by sudden disbelief. He knew these people would upload the footage across various networks.

His initial instinct was to destroy the devices and erase any evidence of his combat skills.

However, he restrained himself. The surrounding crowd comprised ordinary citizens, not hardened mercenaries. While they were not entirely defenseless, they were undoubtedly less strong than the mercenaries he just faced.

Erik's choice to hold back stemmed from the perception of their vulnerability compared to his own strength. He understood that lashing out at them would not only be unnecessary, but also unjust.

Despite the risk the recordings posed, he chose not to escalate the situation further.

However, Erik grappled with the uncertainty about the impact of the public recordings. They posed a double-edged sword, revealing his physical capabilities to his enemies, yet also potentially deterring other foes.

With these conflicting thoughts swirling in his head, he set off in pursuit of June. He blended into the throngs of people filling the city streets, his movements swift as he navigated the bustling urban landscape.

Erik noticed June ahead, navigating through the market stalls. The clone had assumed the form of an unremarkable stray dog, a disguise Erik recognized.

It was the same canine form Erik adopted in the past when he was the one possessing the shapeshifting ability, a clever tactic for blending in with their surroundings and avoiding unwanted attention.

<You look cute, > Erik telepathically said to June.

<Thanks, Master. > The equivalent of a smile appeared on the clone's dog face.

Erik couldn't help but let a small smile cross his face. They had escaped, gaining time in the process. However, he knew how extensive the mercenary guild's influence was in the city. It was only a matter of time before more people would be sent combing the streets to search for them.

For the moment, they enjoyed a momentary sense of freedom. Erik reduced his pace to a brisk walk, his eyes scanning the bustling crowds around them for any signs of pursuit.

He and June knew they had to stay under the radar for a while. Fortunately, the vast expanse of Caelora offered them many hiding spots. The city's size and the constant flow of people provided them with many places to hide.

Their escape had been a close call, and the danger was far from over. But for now, they had a chance to plan their next move, to strategize their survival.

Erik whistled for June to follow. They ducked into a quiet alley. Then June started talking to Erik, knowing he could hear him thanks to his instability brain crystal power.

<That was close. >

<Yeah. >

<What's the plan now? >

Erik ran a hand through his hair. <We need to find a safe place to hide, and I need to contact Noah and the others. >

June nodded. <You think the mercenary guild is onto the whole guild? >

<Definitely, > Erik said.

<If they've got mercenaries hunting us already, it means they learned something. Maybe they found out it was me who destroyed the Crystal Cross Gang in Testrovsc's Rest. >

June's face fell. Their friends were in danger if the guild had linked them together.

Erik placed a hand on June's dog head. <Don't worry. I'll get in contact with the others as soon as I can. Now we should get off the streets. >

<Any ideas where we can lie low? > June's voice resonated through Erik's head.

The young man considered for a moment before responding telepathically.

<According to the system, there's an abandoned district on the outskirts of the city. We can hole up there while I figure out our next move. >

June nodded. <I'll follow you, master. >

The two slipped back into the crowds, but Erik was using his Chameleon Veil to avoid being seen, scanning for threats while June followed by using Erik's scent.

Chapter 732: The smell of roasted meat (1)

Erik and June navigated the streets of Caelora City with cunning stealth.

Erik, rendered invisible by his abilities, moved like a ghost unseen by passersby.

Beside him, June had taken on the clever disguise of a scruffy stray dog blending into the environment.

As a major city at the base of the Caelora Mountains, the city bustled with activity.

Vendors hawked wares from stalls while shoppers examined goods.

Armored mercenaries patrolled the lanes, eyeing the citizens with suspicion in search of the two fugitives.

As a dog, June had to focus on keeping Erik's scent amidst the riot of smells if he wanted to stay with him.

The aroma of frying meat and fresh bread mingled with the smell of foul-smelling armpits.

Despite the early morning hour. People displaying the telltale signs of the day's increasing intensity filled the streets.

Sweat marks bloomed on their shirts, starting from the neck and spreading like a river delta to join the crescent-shaped halos under their armpits.

This early perspiration mirrored the morning dew on the grass, both heralding the onset of a new day's natural cycle - one with the gentle touch of dawn, the other with the relentless climb of the sun.

June's canine nose twitched, picking up traces of Erik's trail - pine needles and snowmelt from the mountains.

In the distance, the snow-capped mountains towered over the city named after it.

Erik gazed at the peaks, knowing many powerful Thaidis made their lairs within those treacherous slopes.

Ancient wyverns and horrific beasts - all lurked in the mountains' hidden valleys and caves.

But that was a concern for another time. Right now, Erik and June's priority was escaping the mercenaries who were hunting them.

The mountains and their mysterious inhabitants would have to wait. Erik tore his gaze from the peaks and refocused on guiding June through Caelora city's crowded streets.

They stuck to the edges and alleys, avoiding the major thoroughfares choked with carts and crowds, while sleek flying cars hummed through the skies overhead.

June's paws padded on the concrete as he traced Erik's invisible passage.

After turning a corner, they came upon a bustling marketplace.

Vendors proclaimed the quality of their wares at the top of their lungs. "Fresh mountain hare! Get your fresh hare here!"

June's mouth watered at the scent. They ate before entering the city, but the smell of meat permeating the air was too enticing.

As they moved through the market, June noticed the people had a hardy look about them.

Broad shoulders and muscular frames were common, no doubt from lives spent laboring in the mountains. These were not weak city folk, but strong frontiersmen.

While passing a tavern, raucous laughter and the sour stench of alcohol emanated from within.

A group of brawny men stumbled out, already drunk, though it was only midday.

June pressed close to the buildings, avoiding their notice.

The clone's stomach rumbled as the scent of roasting meat wafted by.

He glanced around, hoping Erik would let them stop for a snack.

<Stay focused. We can't stop yet. I know you're hungry. > Erik's voice sounded in June's mind.

June gave a small whine but kept padding forward. After a few more minutes, he couldn't help but ask, <Erik, can we please get something to eat soon? That meat smells was amazing. >

<I know, I'm hungry too, > Erik said. <I told you that you would forget the bug's meat once we got to the city. >

<I didn't say the smell was better than the bug's meat. >

<Really? But your emotions say otherwise. >



However, Erik changed the topic. <You know, you can clearly see these people lives below the mountain. >

June nodded. The crowds looked much tougher than the typical city dwellers.

<We'll find a spot to eat soon, > Erik said.

<But we need to get deeper into the city first. Once we're sure we've lost those mercenaries, we can take a break. >

June's stomach growled loudly in protest, but he kept moving, trusting Erik to find them somewhere safe.

Reassured, June focused on keeping up as they wove through the marketplace near the exit gate.

As they traveled deeper into Caelora, the buildings grew taller.

Sleek skyscrapers lined the streets, with glass elevators whisking between levels.

Holographic advertisements flickered on building facades, touting the latest tech and fashions.

Strange vehicles like personal mobility pods hummed down designated sky lanes.

The streets here were bustling with office workers and businesspeople, a stark contrast to the hardy mountain folk found near the market at the exit.

It felt rather peculiar to witness such a stark difference in attire.

It was as though a village and a city had merged side by side.

The villagers seemed to be stuck in a time capsule, dressing as if they were from two centuries ago, while the city dwellers presented themselves in modern, everyday attire.

June and Erik wove between the well-dressed pedestrians who paid no mind to a stray dog.

However, Erik didn't stay idle, and he snatched a phone and a wallet from a person nearby.

He didn't care about it that much, and he knew he couldn't be found out, anyway.

He paid attention due to imperfect invisibility, compensating with increased mana usage to minimize light ripples from the Chameleon Veil.

They slipped down an empty alley, the sounds of the busy street fading.

Erik's scent turned down a narrow passage between two buildings that looked centuries old.

When they arrived inside the alley, Erik stopped channeling mana into his Chameleon Veil neural links and he turned visible again.

He sighed and then picked up the phone he had just stolen, as he couldn't use his own.

He called Noah. The phone rang as Erik reflected on everything that had occurred.

Were his clones safe? If they were searching for him here, it meant they were searching for him everywhere, and his guild would not be left alone. What about Mira? Was she safe?

The guild must have been in chaos due to what is happening. Did he still have his assets? Have they frozen his bank accounts?

Without access to the accounts, he would resort to stealing with the biological supercomputer.

The phone continued ringing. Where was Noah? Why wasn't he picking up? Erik needed to make contact. He had to figure out what had happened and see if the clones needed his help.

But aside from all of this. Why was the Mercenary Guild searching for him? Was this on the Blackguards' orders?

Chapter 733: The smell of roasted meat (2)

It was at that moment Noah answered the phone, but since the number wasn't saved in his contacts, he hesitated before answering, and didn't know the caller's identity.

"Hello?" Noah said.

"Noah, it's me..."

"Master?!" Noah said in surprise. "Are you ok?"

"Of course. Who do you think I am?"

"Yeah, sorry Master, but I was really worried. Where are you know?" Noah asked.

"I'm in Caelora city right now, and you can't imagine what happened."

"Did the mercenaries try to capture you?" Noah made a question, but it was clear he knew what could have happened to his creator.

"So, something happened, am I right?" Erik asked.

"Yes Master. The guild issued a huge bounty on your head. They've accused you of killing civilians in the slums."

Of course, that wasn't true, and both Noah and Erik knew it. The only people Erik had ever killed in the slums were Crystal Cross gang members.

This meant, just as Erik suspected, it was the Blackguards behind it. They must have found out Erik was the one responsible for the attack and were now retaliating.

The Blackguards wanted vengeance. This cemented the idea that the Crystal Cross Gang worked for them. However, there was a nagging doubt in Erik's mind that things weren't as simple as they appeared.

"After the raid, they must have figured out it was you behind the disappearance of the gang Testrovsc's Rest's branch," Noah said.

"It is clear the Blackguards control the Mercenary Guild, so they used their influence to turn the other mercenaries against us."

Erik cursed under his breath. He expected something similar to happen if they found out he was the one who attacked the gang; the problem was that he couldn't understand how they found out.

Indeed, Erik had ventured there openly, yet he had disguised himself behind a mask that he had never worn before.

His attire was different from his usual, and he left no witnesses to his presence.

This anonymity was his shield. In Testrovsc's Rest, masked individuals were not an uncommon sight.

Many roamed the streets, concealing their identities, blending into the crowd.

Thus, even if suspicions arose about his involvement, people couldn't confidently level direct accusations against him.

In a place where masked figures were the norm, the true identity of the assailant could have been anyone.

Falsely accusing him of slaughtering innocents was an ingenious way to get all the other mercenary guilds gunning for him.

"Have they frozen our assets?" Erik asked. If the Blackguards had leverage over the banks too, cutting off their funding could cripple the guild.

"Not yet," Noah said. "But they made a lot of problems, and the other parties cancelled some big contracts. Working for us has become complicated. For safety reasons, I also sent all your money on other accounts I made under aliases. So, our money is safe until they find out."

Erik's mind raced, calculating options as Noah filled him in. Their position was precarious, but he had been in dire straits before.

"And Mira? Is she ok?" Erik feared for her when she stayed behind to stall the mercenaries.

"Yes, but being your woman, she got harassed a lot," Noah said.

"Someone even attacked her once, but thanks to the training technique you provided, she is much stronger than before and got out alive."

Erik let out a breath, relieved Mira was okay.

"Alright Noah, listen closely," Erik said.

"For now, proceed with operations as usual. I don't want us halted by this setback. Move the guild's assets into untraceable accounts and locations. Use any means necessary. Just get it done."

Erik's brow furrowed, his jaw clenching. "However, take this into account: The Mercenary Guild will try to pressure us into handing over the formula for our brain stimulating serum. They may also go after Jabir." Erik shook his head, his fists balling at the thought.

"Keep him safe at all costs. Purchase property under shell companies, and move our production facilities somewhere off the grid. Make sure there is no trail back to us."

Erik ran a hand through his dark hair in frustration. "Jabir doesn't know the whole formula, but he doesn't know that."

Striding over to the alley wall, Erik placed one hand against it and leaned forward, collecting himself. They would find a way through this, he was certain.

"We've been in dire straits before. As long as we keep our wits, we will overcome the Blackguards' treachery in time."

Erik's voice was firm with conviction. They had the will, the resources, and the cunning to survive this. The guild would endure.

"To be honest, I already started all of this some time ago. I'm moving the guild to Liberty Watch's village. I already contacted Samuel and the others."

Erik nodded, a faint smile touching his lips. Erik could always rely on Noah to handle any task.

"Good," Erik said. He clasped his hands behind his back and lifted his chin, a determined glint in his eyes. "I will take care of this matter myself. Don't worry, this situation won't last long."

Noah gazed in front of him. "We all trust you completely, Master."

With a deep breath, Erik straightened to his full height, shoulders back and head held high. His mind was already churning with plans and contingencies.

To deal with the Blackguards had grown from a deferred task to an urgent necessity for Erik.

His initial plan was to head to the mountain range for more training, aiming to amass sufficient strength to challenge the Blackguards with confidence.

However, the situation had transformed. The threat over his guild, friends, and comrades asked for immediate action.

The prospect of delaying any longer posed a risk too grave to contemplate.

Erik realized that the safety of those he cared about hung in the balance, and it was a gamble he was reluctant to take. The time to act against the Blackguards was now ready or not.

"Tell the others to stay strong and vigilant. We will emerge from this trial stronger than ever."

His eyes flashed with icy determination. The Blackguards would pay for their scheme.

He was preparing to investigate about them since he learned about Doran. However, things have become even more personal than they originally were. But first, Erik had to ensure his people's safety and survival, and to do that, he needed more information.

## Chapter 734: Resolve (1)

Erik pocketed his phone, his face a mask of controlled calm. He turned to face June in his dog form. There was a question in his mind. His curious eyes showed that.

<What did Noah say? > June asked.

Erik sighed, running a hand through his hair. <We're in trouble, June. The Blackguards have placed a bounty on my head. They've accused me of killing civilians and asked the Mercenary Guild to hunt us. >

June's ears perked up at this, his tail momentarily stilling. <That's a serious accusation. >

<Yes, it is. > Erik nodded. <They've even canceled many of our contracts. But Noah is moving our money to safe accounts under aliases. >

<What do we do then? >

<We need money, June. > Erik said, his voice hardened with determination. <Our assets are safe for now, but we can't access them without revealing our location. >

Understanding dawned in June's eyes. <You want to use your biological supercomputer system to rob ATMs? >

Erik nodded, a grim smile playing on his lips. <Exactly. I don't like stealing, but we don't have many options right now. >

June wagged his tail, a sign of agreement and readiness to follow Erik's plan. Together, they moved through the shadowy alleyways towards the nearest ATM, of course, using the Chameleon Veil when necessary.

As they got there, Erik started his magic. He asked the system to take money from the device, and it dutifully did.

Now Erik got enough cash to eat, and maybe sleep somewhere, but going into hotels was as risky as using the ATM. To be honest, going everywhere was a risk.

Not because of the security systems, but because of the people. If they recognized him, he was bound to be in huge troubles.

<We'll need a place to stay next, > Erik said as he pocketed the money. <But that won't be easy, considering everyone is searching for me. >

<The guild has my photo, > he said. <The one without the mask. They'll be on the lookout for me. >

<So we can't just walk into a hotel and rent a room, > June said.

<Kind of, and if I wear a mask, they'll be suspicious. It's common knowledge that I usually wear one and they will search for anyone that does. >

June's ears flattened against his head. <This is a tricky situation. >

Erik nodded, his mind racing. He could find an unused apartment, perhaps. But if the Blackguards had his photo, it wouldn't take them long to figure out he was Frant's awakener. His situation would only get worse.

<What do we do then? > June asked. <Could we find somewhere off the grid? A place where no one would think to look? >

Erik took a moment, his gaze unfocused as he pondered on June's question. The idea of hiding in an abandoned warehouse or a derelict building had been his initial idea, but now he was reconsidering.

<Off the grid... >

For the mercenary guild, abandoned buildings were the first places to search. Despite a lot of those were present in the city, that was the most obvious hiding place. Hotels couldn't be used, so as apartments. Erik knew no one in this city and couldn't ask for help.

He then asked the biological supercomputer to connect to the internet here and find abandoned places. The system did it, and Erik had a better grasp of the situation and the potential hiding places.



There were plenty of abandoned buildings, sure, but they were obviously hiding places. The Blackguards would search those first.

A sudden thought struck him. <What about an apartment? > he said, turning his gaze to June.

June's ears perked up at this. <I doubt we will find an empty one. >

<I wasn't thinking about an unused one. >

<Are you suggesting to...? >

<Yes. I'm suggesting of getting rid of the owner. >

Silence ensued. That was cruel, even for Erik, to kill someone just to use the apartment.

<June, we can't stay out in the streets. Besides, using the Chameleon Veil is a good strategy only until we are on the move, > Erik said. <But not that good otherwise and I can't keep it up forever. >

<We will do as you want, Master. >

That was all June could do, obey his creator, but he didn't really like the idea. Erik let out a deep sigh, his mind a whirlpool of thoughts and considerations.

He stood there, contemplating, his gaze distant as he mulled over the intricacies of their situation. The weight of decision-making hung on him, each thought branching into countless others.

<I want to sort this situation out, June. Everytime I finally get something that makes me happy, there is someone else that comes and tries to take it away from me. >

June looked at his master with a sorrowful gaze. <I'm sick of this, > Erik said.

The young man looked down at his clone, a determined glint in his eyes. <I need new powers, > he said.

June's ears perked up at this. <New powers? >

<Yes. If I can get another power that allows me to shapeshift, that would be ideal. >

June wagged his tail, a sign of agreement. <That would certainly help us stay hidden. >

<Yeah. But that is not the only reason. I need to see what the mercenary guild knows about the situation, and I guess that only their more trusted members know something. I doubt there will be information inside the guild's computers. >

June looked up at him, his canine eyes filled with admiration and loyalty. <Are you thinking of...>

Erik smiled at him, reaching down to ruffle his fur. <I'm Exactly thinking about that...> he said smiling.

<Are you sure? It won't be easy with only me and you. >

<I know, but doing that in the wilderness is too complicated. >

June nodded, standing up and shaking off the dust from his fur. <We can do this, Master. We will find a way then, Master. >

Erik nodded. <We will. >

They had a plan now, a course of action. It was risky, but it was their best chance of survival. But the first thing to do was to search for a suitable place to stay, and Erik already had some ideas about where and how to search.

As they moved out of the alley, Erik couldn't help but feel a thrill of anticipation. The Blackguards had made their move, and now it was his turn. He was going to fight back, and he was going to win. He had to.

Chapter 735: Resolve (2)

Cloaked in the semi-transparency shroud of the Chameleon Veil, Erik moved like a ghost through the neon-lit streets of the city.

June padded silently at his heels in his dog form, his leash-less state unnoticed by the people they passed.

The surrounding city was a marvel of modern technology, a testament to the progress of humankind. Sleek skyscrapers, like giant shards of glass, pierced the night sky, their reflective surfaces mirroring the city's vibrant neon lights.

The glow from the buildings bathed the streets below in an ethereal light, casting long shadows on the cobblestone pathways.

Yet, despite its modernity, the city nestled amidst a mountainous landscape showed signs one was unable to see elsewhere. The towering peaks loomed over the cityscape, their jagged silhouettes stark against the starlit sky.

The mountains were a constant reminder of the city's roots and of the dangerous monsters that dwelled outside of the cities. Life there was not easy, as testified by the huge amount of animals roaming the streets.

People bought these animals either to eat or to help with farming. It was weird knowing people still used animals for farming purposes, but Erik guess that was the best they could afford to.

Despite the city's futuristic facade, the people of the city deeply rooted their customs in their mountain heritage.

This was clear in the many food stalls that lined the streets, their aromas wafting through the air. Erik saw people selling meats or animals he never thought of eating.

He was used to pork, chicken and cows, but here you could see ducks, horses and many other kinds of meats. It wasn't weird for them, but it was for Erik, despite him having eaten Thaid's meat for months back in the White Desert.

The food stalls were more than just places to grab a quick bite; they were social hubs where people gathered after a long day.

Laughter and chatter filled the air as people huddled around the stalls, their breaths fogging up in the chilly mountain air.

Despite the late hour, the stalls were bustling with activity, their customers ranging from weary workers to merry revelers.

But people weren't the only things around. The city was abuzz with activity, despite the hour. Hover cars hummed past them, their anti-gravity engines making weird sounds that sometimes scared people.

Drones flitted overhead, their mechanical whirring blending into the city's cacophony. Yet, amidst this symphony of sounds, June followed Erik's scent easily.

Not everything was good, though, at least from Erik's point of view. Mercenaries littered the city, scanning the crowds to search for him. Both he and June had to pay attention not to raise suspicions, but that wasn't easy, even with the aid of the Chameleon Veil.

Erik, shrouded in the semi-transparency provided by the Chameleon Veil, observed an unfolding scene from a safe distance. A group of mercenaries cornered a man, his face obscured by a mask.

The man was tall and broad-shouldered, his posture radiating defiance despite the situation. His attire was rugged and worn, the patches and insignia on his jacket a clear sign of his mercenary background.

But he was a lone wolf and wasn't actively finding Erik. He was just someone who came out to eat something.

The man's protests reverberated through the streets, his voice laced with anger and defiance.

"This is a violation of my privacy!" he said, his fists clenched at his sides.

His words echoed off the cold, hard walls of the surrounding buildings, a desperate plea for justice in a city that seemed to have forgotten the meaning of the word.

The mercenaries, though, had other ideas. "Orders from the guild," he said, his voice devoid of sympathy.

"We must check and identify anyone wearing a mask. I'm sure the guild sent you all a message about this, no?"

"Yes, but..."

"If you received it, then there is just fewer reasons for you to protest. Unless you have something to hide..."

The other mercenaries closed in on the man, their hands on their weapons, ready-to-use force if necessary. But the masked man stood his ground.

Erik and June pressed forward, their footsteps echoing on the city streets. The distant cries of the masked man diminished, becoming mere echoes as they got closer to the mercenary guild.

These fading shouts were soon enveloped by the symphony of the city's nocturnal life—the distant hum of traffic, the occasional barking of a dog, and the subtle rustle of wind through the leaves.

After some time walking, the administrative offices of the Mercenary Guild loomed ahead, a towering edifice of steel and glass.

The building had a heavy fortification, with mercenaries stationed at every entrance and patrolling its perimeter. The sight was daunting, but it wasn't the first time Erik did something like that.

June and Erik paused in a nearby alleyway, taking in the sight of the fortress-like building.

The young man's gaze landed on a side entrance to the administrative offices, guarded by fewer mercenaries than the main entrance. Erik turned to June, his eyes meeting the dog's intelligent gaze.

<Wait for me here, June, > he said through his instability brain crystal power. <I need to go in and get access to their local servers. It won't take long. >

June's canine form shifted, his ears perking up as he heard Erik's words. <Try not killing anyone. >

<I'll try. But don't worry, the system will do what it has as soon as I get in range. I won't need to get that deep inside the building. I doubt I will find many people. >

With a last glance at June, Erik moved toward the building. His form shimmered under the effect of the Chameleon Veil as he moved stealthily towards the side entrance.

However, Erik faced a predicament with the guards stationed at the entrance. While he could easily neutralize them, his concern lay in the potential aftermath.

Engaging the guards risked causing a commotion that could draw unwanted attention. The noise and disturbance might prompt the guild to tighten security around the area and broadcast his whereabouts to enemies.

Such a development could escalate into a large-scale confrontation, something Erik was keen to avoid. He needed to be careful.

#### Chapter 736: New Targets

Erik moved forward, his form barely discernible under the semi-transparency of the Chameleon Veil.

He approached the side entrance with cat-like steps. He glanced back one last time in June's direction.

The clone, despite not being able to see his master, was able to follow him thanks to his scent while in canine form.

Erik made quick work of the two guards, managing to not alert those inside the hall, and finally slipped past the side entrance.

The administrative offices of the Mercenary Guild were a testament to efficiency and modern design. The corridor that Erik moved through was wide and well-lit, making it simple for him to traverse the place.

The walls were a smooth, metallic gray, interrupted at regular intervals by doors leading to various rooms.

The corridor itself was silent except for the low hum of machinery and the occasional murmur of conversation that filtered out from the rooms.

As Erik moved down the corridor, he passed many rooms, each one a mirror image of the last.

The rooms weren't empty. Most of the rooms were being used as offices by the various workers, seated at enormous desks and engrossed in their tasks. Erik had to be extra careful not to be seen.

But they weren't the only ones. Other workers clad in the uniform of the Mercenary Guild moved around. Often carrying heavy boxes full of who knew what.

<Documents? But why would they resort to paper when they could send the files through the computer? >

Guards also patrolled the area. As Erik stepped inside the city, the people at the mercenary guild increased their surveillance several folds. Their fear was that Erik could infiltrate the place and steal information regarding his search.

After he was accused of having killed civilians in the slums, the missions Lyria entrusted secretly to him were inserted by the higher ups into his dossier.

As a result, it was known that he had the skill to enter buildings without detection and exit them with equal ease.

<They are moving following some patterns. That guy there goes left right and after having checked three corridors comes back. >

But Erik was careful to stay out of their path, using his Chameleon Veil to blend into the surroundings and the Instability power to know when to hide or when to change direction, occasionally to make them turn direction by messing with their brains.

As he moved further into the building, he found himself in front of a massive door.

It was guarded by a pair of mercenaries who stood like statues on either side. A label showed this as the "Server Room".

<I'm getting close, June, > he sent a telepathic message to his clone.

Then he turned inward, addressing the biological supercomputer.

<System, connect to the local server. Search the database for mercenaries with Brain Crystal powers. Specifically invisibility, shapeshifting, and healing powers. >

[ACKNOWLEDGED. STARTING CONNECTION.]

The connection had been established swiftly and with no hitches.

Erik could feel the supercomputer working inside his head, its processes rapid and efficient.

[CONNECTION ESTABLISHED. SEARCHING DATABASE NOW.]

Erik started feeling the usual weird rush as the supercomputer injected the information into his brain.

It was not painful, but it was intense - like a sudden rush of knowledge that filled his mind with images and data.

Within moments, he learned who to look for and where to find them.

Images of mercenaries with brain crystal powers had flashed in his mind - their faces, their abilities, their locations. Unfortunately, there was no one with an invisibility brain crystal power in Caelora city. The healers were few and not worth killing just for the sake of getting their brain crystal powers as they looked like decent fellows based on what the mercenary guild had about them.

But the shapeshifters.

<Oh... some of these guys surely need for me to pay a visit...>

Among these people there were the scums of the scums. People accused of having shapeshifted into people to sleep with others.



Some that killed their comrades during quests just to get more money, others who harassed weaker teams and many more things.

The guild knew these people did those things, but most had connections with the guilds that made it hard for them to get publicly accused of something, or for an investigation to take place.

This was especially true when those ties were made to people with particular... tastes, especially for the ones regarding animals.

<That's disgusting. >

Equipped with this new information, Erik's confidence surged. He knew what he needed to do next. The act of eliminating these individuals would bring about advantages, not only to him, but even for society.

<June, I've found what we needed. I'm heading out now. >

<I'm waiting here, Master. >

Erik retraced his steps back through the maze of corridors, desks, and terminals.

His Chameleon Veil had kept him hidden from the workers and guards as he slipped back through the massive door and down the long corridors.

When he reached the entrance, June was waiting for him at a safe distance.

The clone's ears perked up at Erik's approach, his tail wagging.

Erik had given him a nod of acknowledgment, but he forgot he was invisible. Luckily, June noticed him because of the scent, and didn't see that awkward gesture.

<That was embarrassing. >

<What was embarrassing? >

<Nothing... Hey, I found a suitable place for us to sleep. >

<Really? Where? >

<You will see. Soon. >

With June at his heels, Erik had melted back into the crowd, his mission in the Mercenary Guild's administrative offices complete.

Erik brimmed with anticipation at the prospect of getting another shapeshifting ability, a tool he eagerly planned to use to sow chaos within the ranks of the Mercenary Guild and, by extension, the Blackguards.

The information he just got was a key to unlocking this potential, fueling his desire to unleash disruption and confusion among his adversaries.

For the moment, however, he recognized the need for discretion. It was a time for careful planning and staying under the radar, laying the groundwork for the impending turmoil he intended to bring upon his foes.

Chapter 737: The apartment (1)

Melded into the crowd, Erik and June had moved like phantoms. The surrounding city was increasing its activities since the night started.

A symphony of sights and sounds that were both chaotic and harmonious engulfed them like a wave and allowed them to talk without the fear of being heard. If they wished.

Neon lights danced upon the surfaces of buildings, casting multicolored glows that bathed the streets in an ethereal hue.

<What's the plan now, Master? You mentioned you found a place for us to sleep tonight. >

<Yes. I wanted to get some new powers, and since we are going to kill a couple of people, I just guessed the best thing would have been to stay in their apartments. >

<Understood. You have someone in mind already? >

<Yes, actually. It's a guy with a shapeshifting ability. It is not as powerful as we need it to be, but if we can merge it with others to get something better, so I'm not worried. >

June had paused for a moment. <Is killing him to get his brain crystal power really the right thing to do? >

<I don't care, > Erik said, his tone devoid of emotion.

<This guy is a real scum. The guild has evidence he murdered his comrades during quests just to hoard more rewards. The only reason he wasn't arrested or killed is because he has some friends in the mercenary guild that covered his wrongdoings. This doesn't mean the guild didn't collect evidence or investigated the matter. >

Upon hearing Erik's words, June tensed, a subtle stiffening of his posture reflecting his inner turmoil.

That someone could coldly betray and eliminate friends and comrades for mere financial gain was an incomprehensible idea for him.

Yet, his lack of understanding did not mean ignorance. Deep within, he held Erik's memories, a source of experiences that made him aware of such harsh realities.

These memories served as a reminder of the world's cruel nature, even if the concept remained difficult for June to grasp at an emotional level.

<So, we could say that killing him is going to be good, right? >

<Murder is never right, June. But I am a hypocrite, you know. >

Erik knew his actions strayed from the moral path, yet his experiences had taught him the harsh truth that life seldom followed the rules of fairness.

He had learned through bitter encounters that if he always chose the morally correct option in the face of dilemmas, he would have met his demise long ago.

Meanwhile, June stood beside him, his head bowed, immersed in his own thoughts.

The complexity of what churned in Erik's mind eluded him, but it did not perturb him.

His loyalty was not contingent on understanding every facet of Erik's plans; his faith in Erik's judgment was absolute.

<We'll use his identity to hide and rest. With luck, we should be able to lie low for the next weeks. >

<How long do you plan on staying in this city? > June asked.

<Long enough to get what I need, and to find out what the hell is happening. >

Erik and June had moved through the city like shadows, their forms blending seamlessly into the urban tapestry.

They navigated the labyrinth of streets with ease, not only because of the two's powers, but also by taking advantage of the many people outside.

After some time walking, they arrived at the mercenary's residence, a towering skyscraper that pierced the sky.

The building was a marvel of modern architecture, with reflective glass mirroring the city's neon lights.

The skyscraper was in one of the city's most prestigious districts. It looked like the man's murders weren't for nothing. But he couldn't judge that yet. He needed to see the apartment yet.

The duo entered, with June rushing in at top speed. A sign said dogs weren't allowed, so the clone sprinted at top speed to avoid being seen.

The entrance to the skyscraper was grand, with a large revolving door that led to a spacious lobby.

Inside, the lobby was as opulent as the exterior, with marble floors and high ceilings. A large reception desk sat in the middle, manned by robotic assistants who attended to residents and visitors.

Erik and June had slipped past the reception desk unnoticed. They made their way to the elevator, which whisked them up to the mercenary's apartment on one of the higher floors.

<We are finally going to rest after this is done. >

Exhaustion weighed heavily on Erik and June. Their journey to the city had been long and arduous, and upon their arrival, they were thrust into a battle for survival.

The relentless pace of the day afforded them no respite to eat or sleep.

Erik, in particular, faced the added strain of infiltrating the mercenary guild to gather the information he needed.

The toll of their schedule was clear in their weary movements, and the fatigue etched on their faces. Despite their resilience, the physical and mental demands of the day had pushed them to their limits.

<I can't wait to sleep in a bed, > June said.

<Don't get too comfortable yet. We don't know if the guy is at home.>

As they ascended through the skyscraper, Erik and June found themselves in the elevator's silence. The hum of the city below was a distant murmur, replaced by the whirl of the elevator's machinery.

<Do you think he's home? >

<Regardless, we'll deal with him either sooner or later. > Erik's tone was calm and collected.

<What we will do about the body? > June asked, his voice tinged with unease. Despite his trust in Erik, he couldn't help but worry about the potential complications of what they were going to do.

<I'll take care of it,> Erik said, leaving it at that. He didn't elaborate further, choosing to keep his plans to himself. If he needed June's help, he would just tell him what to do. However, there was some unease in his tone. If he didn't kill the man as soon as he stepped inside the apartment, or as soon as they entered, they would bound to make a commotion, and that was going to be dangerous.

#### Chapter 738: The apartment (2)

The elevator ride seemed to stretch on forever, but in the end, they reached the right floor.

The doors slid open with a soft hiss, revealing a long hallway lined with reinforced apartment doors.

Each door was a monument to security and privacy, their heavy-duty construction designed to keep unwanted visitors at bay. But that wasn't a problem Erik couldn't solve.

Be it brute strength, or the precision of the biological supercomputer, the young man could easily enter. However, it was clear brute strength was going to make the apartment a doorless shell.

Erik and June stepped out of the elevator. There was nowhere in sight, but still the young man kept himself concealed through the Chameleon Veil, with June still in his dog form, to avoid alerting the security system or people coming out of their apartments to go on with their day.

The understated illumination from the led lights bathed the hallway in a muted glow, sculpting elongated silhouettes on the reflective flooring.

The atmosphere was crisp and clinical, a notable divergence from the city's pulsating vitality that thrummed stories below.

<This fellow chose an interesting place to buy a house. >

The apartment doors lined the hallway at regular intervals, reflecting the subdued radiance with their alloyed facades.

Each door bore a number, and it wasn't hard to find the man's apartment door among the many in the hallway.

<616. Is this the right door? > June asked.

<Yes. >

Erik fixed his gaze on the door, already working in his mind on how to bypass its security. June remained by his side, ensuring no one saw them. Despite his unease, he trusted Erik's judgment.

Erik reached inward, mentally connecting with the biological supercomputer.

<Access the security system, > Erik said. The computer gave an almost instantaneous reply.

[PROCESS STARTED. SCANNING FOR NETWORK ACCESS POINTS.]

Seconds later, it gave Erik some additional information.

[ACCESS POINT DETECTED. ESTABLISHING CONNECTION.]

Erik was curious how the biological supercomputer was able to do all of that. After years of having received this miraculous technology, he wasn't yet closer to the truth of its origins or neither how it worked.

The only thing Erik knew was that this thing came from the Mur continent, which his father obviously went to. He knew that someone was searching for it, and that those people were likely the Blackguards. But most importantly, he knew that once he died; he was bound to become a biological supercomputer himself.

That honestly sparked questions. Was it possible that a person or a part of a person originally became the biological supercomputer he had?

Were human experiments involved in the making of this thing? Besides, how were the Blackguards aware of it?

As he had these thoughts, the biological supercomputer did his thing. Erik felt the computational processes resonating like a subtle undercurrent in the depths of his mind.

It was akin to a secondary pulse, a rhythmical echo that punctuated his cognitive processes.

This rhythm was a complex symphony of data analysis and algorithmic problem-solving, a testament to the fusion of biology and technology that lived within his brain.

[CONNECTION ESTABLISHED. ACCESSING SECURITY SYSTEMS.]

The supercomputer's voice echoed in Erik's mind.

<Thanks, > he said, but got no reply from the mighty AI this time. Perhaps the mighty AI was too focused on opening the door, and that was why it didn't reply.

Then he felt the supercomputer's processes speeding up, its mental presence growing as it navigated the complex digital landscape of the security systems. It was like watching a master at work, its actions precise and efficient.

[SECURITY SYSTEMS ACCESSED. DISABLING SURVEILLANCE DEVICES.]

There was a moment of silence. Then, the supercomputer spoke again.

[SURVEILLANCE DEVICES DISABLED. UNLOCKING DOOR.]

There was a soft click as the door unlocked, the sound echoing in the silent hallway. Erik and June exchanged a glance.

[DOOR UNLOCKED. SECURITY SYSTEMS BYPASSED.]

<Well. It was easy, right? >

<Yes, Master. >

<Be ready then, we don't know what we will find once inside. >



With the security systems disabled and the door unlocked, Erik and June were free to enter the apartment. Their mission was just beginning.

While crossing the boundary of the doorway, they found themselves enveloped in the apartment's ambiance. It was an expansive, contemporary space. For some reasons Erik expected the place to be spartan. The owner was a mercenary, after all, and not one very respected.

The furnishings had a streamlined and polished appearance, with their sleek surfaces reflecting the chrome finishes and touch-sensitive controls of the innovative appliances that adorned the room.

The walls were more than just structural boundaries. They were canvases for digital art displays.

<I didn't think this guy had an artistic side... Well, there's always something to learn. >

These screens showcased a dynamic array of colors and patterns, their hues morphing and transitioning into an entrancing visual ballet that added a layer of vibrancy to the room.

Some depicted abstract forms, others mirrored the pulsating rhythm of the city, creating a mesmerizing fusion of technology and artistry that breathed life into the space.

The apartment, perched high above the city, seemed to exist in its own world, a bubble of tranquility amidst the ceaseless energy of the metropolis below.

<Finally, I can take a shower, > June's voice echoed in Erik's mind as he surveyed the apartment. His canine form shimmered and shifted, morphing into a human shape very close to Erik's one, but with some differences due to the blood he gave him to morph into a human.

<Don't get too comfortable, > Erik said. <We'll likely get dirty later. >

June's face fell at Erik's words, his excitement replaced by disappointment.

Despite their shared appearance, they were two distinct individuals, each with their own thoughts and feelings, and he clearly didn't relish the idea of getting dirty again so soon.

Erik knew that. Since he spent months close to the clone, he learned a lot about him. He wondered why his power to make clones resulted in creatures that weren't exactly like this, but he assumed it was due to the Mirror's centipede peculiar brain crystal power.

<Alright, > he sighed, his disappointment clear even in his telepathic voice. <I'll just rest then. >

With that, June moved further into the apartment, leaving Erik alone in the entrance.

The young man closed the door, and with a click, the room fell into silence.

#### Chapter 739: Uninvited owner (1)

Erik ambled towards the plush sofa, sinking into its welcoming embrace. The soft cushions conformed to his form, providing a comfort he hadn't experienced in a while.

Across from him, June mirrored his actions, his human form now apparent, albeit unclothed. A moment of silence passed between them before Erik broke it with a jest.

"If someone walks in right now, they might think we're having 'a moment.'"

June's response was quick and equally humorous. "Well, at least it would be a memorable first impression."

Both of them burst into a hearty laugh. These past weeks had been tense, and having a moment of respite was a welcome relief.

However, the humor in the room and the comfy sofa were insufficient to fully erase the weariness both had.

However, to be able to sit on a couch, in a safe space, was a luxury they hadn't been afforded in a long while. In particular, June never had the pleasure. He remembered how it was from Erik's memories, but they were that. Just memories.

The feeling of the soft fabric against their skin, the gentle give of the cushions beneath their weight, was completely different from the sand or the ground he was used to.

Erik glanced over at June, a smirk playing on his lips. "You know, June." Erik's tone was casual. "I'm happy to see you are comfortable, but you are smearing your balls' sweat all over the cushions."

June looked at Erik, blinking in surprise before another laugh erupted from him. "Well," he said between chuckles, "Wasn't comfort really is in the details? Who knows, maybe the smell will help you sleep better!"

Erik didn't reply.

For June, the experience was unique. Born just four months prior, he was still discovering the world and its many sensations.

"Sitting on a sofa is better than expected," June said aloud, his eyes reflecting a sense of wonder. "Can't wait to test out the bed."

Erik chuckled at June's comment. A playful smirk appeared on his face. "Careful with your wording there, June."

"Stop it, please!"

Erik laughed again. But there were many things the clone wanted to see. Despite being a clone, June was not Erik. He had Erik's memories, yes, but they were like scenes from a movie he'd never starred in.

They were experiences he knew but hadn't lived through himself. Although they shared physical attributes and memories, their thoughts and feelings were their own.

They were two distinct entities sharing an uncanny connection. They looked alike, shared memories, but their experiences and perceptions of the world were their own.

The exchange between them was light-hearted, and it helped them both ease the tension they felt since coming into the city.

Erik reached for the remote, pressing the power button and bringing the sleek, wall-mounted television to life.

The screen flickered for a moment before illuminating the room with its vibrant display.

June, who had only caught a fleeting glimpse of the television back in the city's entrance room, where they had been momentarily detained, was now utterly enthralled.

His eyes were wide with curiosity and anticipation. The glow from the television screen reflected in them, creating a mesmerizing dance of colors that only added to his childlike wonder.

It was a sight that Erik found both endearing and somewhat amusing.

The sight of June, so fascinated by something Erik had long since taken for granted, brought a smile to his face. It was a moment of purity amidst their insanely complex reality, a reminder of the simple joy of discovery.

June's face was lit up, his features softening as he watched the television with rapt attention. His lips were slightly parted in amazement, his brow furrowed in concentration as he tried to take in every detail.

It was as if he was trying to absorb the world through the television screen, eager to learn and experience everything he could.

June's memories, Erik's memories, contained countless hours spent in front of a television screen. But this was different.

This was June's first encounter with the device, and Erik could see the thrill of discovery etched on his face.

Erik leaned back into the plush sofa, his gaze shifting from the television screen to June. "Want to find something you'd like to watch?" he asked, offering the remote to June.

June's eyes lit up at Erik's offer. He nodded with enthusiasm, reaching out to take the remote from Erik's hand.

His fingers danced over the buttons, changing channels with an eagerness that was almost palpable.

The room filled with a cacophony of sounds as scenes from various channels flashed across the screen, each one holding June's attention for a fleeting moment before he moved on to the next.

In the end, he settled on a channel talking about history. The screen displayed images of the past, a documentary narrating the catastrophic events that had shaped their world.

The emergence of the Thaidis, their destructive rampage through the cities, and the ensuing death toll that numbered in millions. The somber tone of the narrator filled the room, a chilling reminder of their reality.

June's face took on a serious expression as he watched the documentary unfold. His brows furrowed in concentration, his lips pressed into a thin line.

Having Erik's memories, June hadn't bombarded his maker with questions about the Thaidis. He knew what Erik knew, had seen what Erik had seen.

However, there was one thing that gnawed at his curiosity - the origin of the Thaidis. Why did they come? What was their purpose? These were questions that Erik's memories couldn't answer. They were enigmas wrapped in a mystery.

His gaze remained fixed on the television screen, lost in thought. The images of destruction and despair were disturbing, but they also fueled his desire to understand.

To know why such monsters had come into being and caused such devastation. It was a curiosity born out of a need for understanding, a need to make sense of the world he had sunk into.

<None kno — >

Erik's words were broken by an unexpected sound. The distinct noise of a door unlocking echoed through the apartment, jarring them both from their thoughts. Their heads whipped towards the entrance, eyes full of focus and murderous intent.

The owner of the apartment was home.

Chapter 740: Uninvited Owner (2)

The front door creaked open, revealing the silhouette of a man swaying on the threshold. The light from the hallway seeped into the apartment, casting an eerie glow around him.

His name was Terrence, Erik's unsuspecting target.

Terrence was a man of considerable stature, standing well over six feet tall.

His broad shoulders strained against the fabric of his expensive suit, a testament to the life he lived as a mercenary, and of the stuff he did to get money.

His hair was a disarray of dark curls, slightly matted with sweat and sticking out in odd directions.

His face, usually handsome with sharp features and a strong jawline, was now flushed and slack with intoxication.

A pair of bleary, bloodshot eyes squinted into the apartment, trying to make sense of the flickering light from the television.

A look of confusion crossed his face as he stumbled further into the room, the door closing behind him with a soft click.

"Did I leave the damn TV on?" His words slurred. He was likely came from a bar or a tavern, and he obviously drank alcohol. He stood for a moment, swaying as he tried to remember.

Terrence had a peculiar quirk when he was drunk. He talked to himself, carrying on one-sided conversations as if there were someone else in the room.

It was a habit that had always amused the few friends he had but had often left him feeling embarrassed the morning after.

"Damn it, Terrence." He shook his head as if to clear his thoughts. "You need to stop forgetting things."

He made his way toward the television, his steps unsteady and uneven.

He stumbled once or twice, catching himself against the wall before continuing on his path. His hands fumbled for the remote, missing it a few times before finally turning off the TV.

The sudden silence in the room seemed to startle him. He blinked, looking around in confusion before shaking his head again.

"Must've been one hell of a party." A self-deprecating chuckle escaping his lips.

Unaware of Erik and June's presence in the room, Terrence continued toward his bedroom, leaving a trail of discarded clothing behind him.

His drunken state made him oblivious to the danger lurking in his own home - a danger that was watching him with cold, calculating eyes.

Erik and June exchanged a glance, their expressions grim. This was their target - a man who seemed more pitiful than threatening in his current state.

But they knew better than to underestimate him. After all, appearances could be deceiving.

<What are we going to do, Master? > June's telepathic voice echoed in Erik's mind, a note of concern clear in his tone. <He's in no state to defend himself. >

Erik could feel the conflict in June's thoughts, a mirror of his own feelings. To kill an unarmed man, especially one as incapacitated as Terrence, went against their ingrained sense of fairness.

<Our lives come first, June. We didn't choose this path. Life forced it upon us. >

There was a pause as June contemplated Erik's words. His master could feel the turmoil in his clone's thoughts, the struggle between their shared sense of morality and the need to get more power.

<You're right, > June said, his mental voice subdued. <But I don't really like it... >

Erik shared his sentiment, but they both knew there was no other choice.

The young man stepped out from under the veil of invisibility, the shimmering distortion fading away to reveal his form. His flyssa was sheathed at his side, its hilt gleaming in the dim light.

The sound of his footsteps on the floor echoed in the silent apartment, drawing Terrence's attention. The man turned around, his bleary eyes widening in surprise as he took in Erik's appearance.

"What the...?" Terrence's slurred words hung in the air, a question left unanswered as Erik moved with lethal precision.

In a single, swift movement that seemed to blend with the surrounding shadows, Erik unsheathed his flyssa.

The sword glinted under the dim lighting of the apartment, its curved blade reflecting the scant light in a chilling dance of death.

To close the distance between them was a matter of mere moments for Erik.

His movements were fluid and precise, like a predator closing in on its prey.

Terrence, caught off guard by the sudden appearance of his assailant, barely had time to register what was happening.

There was no time for Terrence to react, no opportunity for him to mount a defense.

Frozen in fear, he watched as Erik's blade closed in on him, his impending doom becoming more real.

Erik's blade found its mark with unerring accuracy. The sharp metal cut through fabric and flesh with equal ease.

Terrence's words turned into a strangled gasp, a sound that was abruptly cut off as his life was extinguished.

[HUMAN KILLED: MANA ABSORBING PROCESS STARTING.]



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

[MANA SUCCESSFULLY ABSORBED, STARTING CONVERTING PROCEDURE.]

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

[MANA SUCCESSFULLY CONVERTED INTO EXPERIENCE 968 EXPERIENCE POINTS  
AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

The deed was done. Erik stood over Terrence's lifeless body, his expression unreadable.

Erik's gaze swept over the lifeless form strewn haphazardly on the polished hardwood floor, his eyes devoid of any discernible emotion.

Terrence was now reduced to nothing more than a lifeless husk.

His once lively eyes, typically filled with a boisterous energy, were now vacant and dull.

His features, usually stressed by a confident smirk or a playful wink, were now distorted by the grim finality of death.

His strong jawline was slack, and his full lips were tinged with an unnatural blue hue. The curls that usually framed his face were matted with blood and stuck to his forehead, adding to the macabre sight before Erik.

His clothes were now marred by a spreading crimson stain. Erik's gaze lingered on Terrence's form for a moment longer before he turned away.

<He wasn't an innocent, > Erik's telepathic voice echoed in June's mind, his tone devoid of emotion.  
<He killed many outside the city just for greed. This man deserved his fate. >

June didn't respond, but Erik could feel his agreement. They both knew that Terrence's actions had warranted this fate.

<What do we do now? > June asked.

<Put him in the bathtub, > he said. <We need to clean up and leave no trace behind. >