

## **BIOLOGICAL 801**

### Chapter 801: Reuniting (1)

Erik hesitated at the threshold, his hand resting on the doorframe. Each step forward felt like wading through deep water, resistance pulling at his every movement.

While leaving his clones behind, he took a deep breath and forced himself to leave the room.

He had left his friends believing he was dead, a deception that now twisted in his heart like a knife.

He felt guilty the whole way, regretting what he did on his lonely walk.

As he moved, the faces of his friends flashed in his mind. He could almost hear their laughter, see their smiles, and feel the warmth of their love.

But now, he felt unworthy of that warmth, undeserving of their friendship. He had abandoned them, left them to face uncertainty and danger alone.

The thought of Amber added a sharper edge to his pain. He had left her to mourn, to grapple with loss.

How could he face her now, knowing the depth of the hurt he had caused? Being aware she knew about Mira?

Their love, which used to be a source of strength, now seemed like something he lost because of what he did.

And then there was Mira. To her, he had not been entirely truthful, withholding parts of his life that now lay exposed.

He feared her reaction, the potential look of hurt and betrayal in her eyes.

The possibility that she might turn away from him was a thought he could hardly bear.

With each step, his heart grew heavier. He felt as though he was walking towards judgment, towards a reckoning he had brought upon himself.

The idea of facing them, of seeing the impact of his choices reflected in their eyes, was almost too much to bear.

Erik paused for a moment, his hand on the doorknob, gathering what little courage he had left.

He knew this face-off was bound to happen, a necessary step towards redemption, if it was still doable.

Erik opened the door, stepping into the room where his friends and lovers awaited.

His heart raced, his mind a tumult of emotion. He was ready to face the consequences of his actions, to apologize and seek forgiveness, even if he felt he no longer deserved it.

The door closed behind him with a soft click, marking the end of one journey and the uncertain beginning of another.

As Erik stepped into the room, the atmosphere was thick with a tension that clung to the air like a heavy mist.

Before him, his friends were arrayed on a makeshift sofa, cobbled together from materials scavenged within the city.

Their eyes turned towards him, wide with a mix of emotions—disbelief, sadness, and a glimmer of joy at seeing him alive.

Amber, Floyd, Gwen, Mickey, Aaron, Benedict, and Martha - each of them wore expressions that painted a picture of their inner turmoil.

They looked at Erik as though he was a shadow, a ghost from a past they had mourned and buried. In their gaze, he saw the sorrow of loss, now mingled with the relief of reunion.

Amber's eyes held complex feelings, her face a canvas of the pain and betrayal she had gone through.

But deep down, there was a brief glimmer of joy in her eyes.

Mira's expression was even more complex. Alongside the relief of seeing Erik, there was a clear sense of betrayal.

She knew of Erik's strength and knew he was safe, but the revelations about his past—the truths he had concealed from her—had left a mark of anger and confusion.

Floyd, Gwen, Mickey, Aaron, Benedict, and Martha each grappled with their own reactions.

The shock of seeing Erik alive was clear, but so too was their desire for answers.

Since they knew about Erik's multiple powers, they had a myriad of questions.

They wanted to understand how Erik had become so powerful, what secrets he held.

The most pressing question in their minds was about Erik's true nature. Was he really an awakener? Had he deceived them all along?

Erik stood there, his heart pounding in his chest as he took in each of their faces.

The silence in the room was deafening, a void filled with unspoken words and unshed tears.

He knew he owed them an explanation, a truth that he kept hidden for a long time, but that he was now ready to share.

He tried to say something, but couldn't find the words. How can he even explain his crazy powers and why he kept them a secret?

How could he show how heavy his abilities were and the tough choices he had to make because of that burden?

Erik took a deep breath, steeling himself. This was the moment of truth.

He had to come clean and spill the tea on his secrets. He had to give them something.

"Hi."

That was all Erik said. A small silence ensued.

"Hi? That's all you have to say?"

"Glad to see you too, Benedict," Erik said.

There was a tense silence then. "How are you?" Floyd asked.

Erik hesitated. "Well, I'm tired. I had to journey through the Eldraith mountain range. You know, that place is nasty."

It was a shocking revelation for all. Mira, living close to the mountain range, knew about it.

The mountains acted as a barrier between Frant and Etrium, thus making Testrovsc's Rest the nearest city to the mountain range from Etrium's side.

Despite knowing Erik was strong, the thought of him having to cross that place terrified her.

"You never listen to me, do you?" Those words from Mira grabbed everyone's attention.

Erik scratched his head. "Sorry." Mira sighed.

"So, don't you think you owe us an explanation? Noah told us a lot of things already. However, it should be you to explain yourself. You can't demand this to your... clones..."

"You are right. First, let me say you something. I'm sorry."

"You already apologized, didn't you?" Gwen said.

"Yes, but this time I'm talking about what I put you through."

"No amounts of apologizes will make things better. You know that."

"I do." Erik could only sigh again.

"We thought you were dead," Mickey said.

"I had to make you believe that. Noah should have told you already."

"He did," Amber then said. Her eyes burning with rage, but Erik didn't have the strength to look at them.

Chapter 802: Reuniting (2)

Erik's gaze wavered, unable to meet Amber's fiery eyes.

The weight of guilt made it impossible for him to face her.

His eyes darted around the room, avoiding her intense stare.

His hesitant posture and uneasy eyes revealed the burden of his actions.

But then he sighed. "I don't know what Noah did exactly tell you. He knows why I did everything, but I bet he kept out part of the reason."

To that, the others looked at him. It was clear what Noah said wasn't the whole truth, maybe because of guilt, or maybe for other reasons, but Noah made it clear he wasn't saying everything.

Since the Blackguards were searching for the biological supercomputer, and considering he already showed a lot of powers to his enemies, to Erik, it no longer made sense to hide the truth to even his friends.

That was especially true since they were now involved in the war against them.

"Two years ago, after another day of bullying, I got a visit. My father came back. But I already told you that."

The others nodded. That was not something new, as he shared that with them back at the Red Palace.

"What I never told you. What I told no one is that he brought something with him."

The group leaned forward. It was clear what Erik was going to say was important.

Intrigued, they stared at Erik. Everyone's posture changed, showing their keen interest in his words.

The atmosphere in the room changed, now charged with anticipation, as they awaited the unveiling of Erik's long-kept secret.

"It was a glass container. In it there was a weird creature I assumed was a dead thaid. However, it wasn't one of them."

To that, Erik could only sigh.

"I freaked out when I broke the container, went to the kitchen to clean that mess, but when I went back to the room, that thing was nowhere to be found."

Erik's words intensified their curiosity. The group exchanged thoughtful glances. All eyes turned to Erik, full of wonder.

The mystery captivated them, pulling them into his narrative. They grew more curious because it actually happened.

"I went to the kitchen to grab a knife. I was scared. After all. What could have I done back there? I had no mana, a useless brain crystal power, no training whatsoever. To be honest, that was just the cherry on top of the cake."

You could imagine how mentally unwell I was at that time."

Everyone but Mira nodded. She knew Erik didn't have a peaceful life based on what Noah said, but he didn't know to what extent.

What did he mean when he said he had no mana? From what she remembered, Erik had enough mana to fight, to the point he could be considered being at the top of the food chain in the whole Testrovsc's Rest. She found all of this news to be quite weird.

"Then, as I grabbed the knife, I turned to kill whatever that thing was. Unfortunately, or not to be honest, that thing jumped on my face and inserted something in my throat. It was then that I lost consciousness."

The others were taken aback when they heard that information.

To accidentally break a container enclosing a weird creature was an already scary event, but it became even more terrifying for Erik, given his situation at that time.

It was difficult for them to understand the emotions he experienced when that unexpected thing suddenly leaped into his face.

"When I woke up, I was welcomed by weird interfaces only I could see. These briefly explained that the creature was, in fact, a sort of very advanced biological AI. It calls itself the Biological Supercomputer. You can guess the rest. I learned that thing is able to make me absorb brain crystal powers from creatures."

Their reaction to the situation was one of complete and utter shock.

While they were aware of Erik's possession of multiple brain crystal powers, what they didn't know was that he had got them by stealing from other creatures.

"When you say creatures," Gwen said, "You aren't only referring to thaids, right?"

"Indeed."

A heavy silence descended. When Floyd saw Erik's power back when he took the guild's test to increase his rank, the same test that made him famous in Etrium.

He thought his powers were awfully similar to some he had already seen. Of course, he said that to the others.

"Did you kill Nathaniel?" Gwen asked.

"I did." Erik didn't sugarcoat his words. "But that was self-defense. While I was escaping from the Blirboth attack on New Alexandria, this douchebag and his hired thugs came after me. He wanted to kill me. What was I supposed to do, let him?" Erik sounded really mad this time.

"I wasn't imply—"

"And what were you implying, Gwen?"

Erik was forced to interrupt his friend. Gwen had always been slightly guarded against him.

"Erik," Mickey chimed in. "If what you're saying is true, that means his father attacked us because of you. People died because of that. Anderson was one of them. He was your friend."

Without a doubt, that was a truthful statement. Erik was fully conscious of that fact. He should not be held liable for the deeds of that insane person.

"Maybe I caused it, but I'm not to blame for what he did. Also, I was there with you all to rescue the hostages, remember? I knew it was my fault, and I did what I could to save everyone. You already know that."

However, the others were getting agitated, especially Aaron. "Yes, that is true, but by then, you should have had many powers. Why didn't you use them to save him? Why you didn't save everyone?"



Silence returned. That was a natural question. If Erik had many powers, why didn't he use one to save Anderson? Many of the deceased were their highschool peers, some of whom they trained and laughed with. They were not insignificant.

### Chapter 803: Reuniting (3)

There are loads of reasons. So many reasons, you wouldn't believe it. To begin with, that's a load of crap. I couldn't save Anderson, but I used my powers to save you guys. Did you forget what I did at the club's exit? You didn't forget the questions you all made while we were on the run, did you?

"

Erik's tone was now cold. It was true he did many mistakes, but he never had the intention of harming anyone.

"Plus, what if I used more powers, huh? What was the surefire way for me to save everyone? You think I'm invincible just because I have a couple more powers, but that's not what really makes someone powerful. There are two things I lacked back then, Mana and Experience."

For them, experience was obvious, but what did he mean when he said mana?

"You are talking as if you can increase your mana... or..."

"Yes. I can increase my mana. That's one of the advantages of the biological supercomputer. But I gotta kill to make it happen."

An uneasy silence descended, but it was quickly broken by Benedict. "That's pretty cool. Hey, do you have another biological supercomputer I could borrow?"

In response, Erik let out a hearty laugh, his amusement clear on his face. He almost forgot how his roommate was.

"Unfortunately not, otherwise I would have given you one long ago."

"So, you increased your mana?" Floyd asked. "Yes. At the moment, I am at the B rank on the Ferebitz scale."

"B rank? Damn you were at D!"

"Indeed."

Then Amber chimed in. She had a serious and disappointed look on her face. "So, you weren't telling the truth," she said, her voice filled with disappointment. "From the beginning, you deceived everyone with your lies. I assume you are not even an awakener, right?"

"I didn't lie. I just didn't tell you about that. You get how risky it was for me to say that, huh? What if one of you tried to kill me or kidnap me to get the biological supercomputer?"

To that, Amber got really mad. "How could you say something like that?"

"Amber. I have the most powerful weapon in this world. Do you think I was exaggerating? Besides, what if one of you said something you shouldn't have? I would have been dead by now!"

He then resumed his speech. "I'm not an awakener, that is true. But does it matter? Until I stay alive, I'm bound to become much more powerful than any awakener that ever existed, maybe even stronger than Solomon Judd."

"Let's not change the topic," Aaron said. "Even if you didn't have enough mana or experience, you still could've helped Anderson somehow."

Erik stared at him for a few seconds. "Yeah. Let's assume I co've done something. Then this huge target would've popped up, not just on my back, which I already had, but on yours too."

At that, everyone remained silent. "Imagine what would have Becker done once he learned you were the friends of the guy with multiple powers. Do you think he wouldn't have used you to get to me? It was already bad when I learned you weren't the only ones who knew about my secret. I had no choice but to escape and make everyone believe I was dead, so you could have a chance."

A profound silence engulfed the room as Erik's words were absorbed. The dawn of comprehension settled on their faces, replacing curiosity with a grave awareness.

They exchanged looks, each one reflecting a shared acknowledgment of the danger Erik had shielded them from.

As the realization of the risks he had taken to protect them sank in, their expressions softened and their eyes were filled with a combination of gratitude and a newfound sense of respect.

The tension in the air eased slightly as they came to terms with the harsh reality of the situation Erik had faced.

They realized his actions, though painful, were borne out of a deep sense of responsibility and care for their safety.

"You may have had your reason to think that, but you are also thinking too badly of Becker," Amber said.

Much to his own disbelief, Erik did something he had never expected doing. He rudely replied to Amber.

"You're really defending that asshole? Do you have any clue how hard I worked to avoid his attention? And that didn't even work well."

Amber was startled and pulled back, feeling surprised by the tone Erik used. With a mixture of hurt and disbelief flashing across her face, her eyes widened in surprise.

"Becker is here. Just so you know, he told us a ton of stuff. Turns out, he was the first to fight the Blackguards. Becker said he knew the criminal underworld in Frant was led by them through a man called Shade. So, according to him, the Crystal Cross Gang kidnapped people and gave them to the Blackguards. Based on his investigations, they experimented on them," Floyd said.

"I'm aware of that. I discovered that on my own a while ago. But that doesn't mean he never did some messed up stuff."

"Yes, but he did that to save us all," Gwen said. "If you had just trusted him, maybe none of this would've happened."

"Seriously? How was I supposed to know he was one of the good ones? He didn't lift a finger when the Heniate attacked. He coiled underground in fear."

As Erik listened to his friends, his heart filled with aching sorrow. He completely understood the profound extent of their suffering and acknowledged that he was the cause of their hardships. Yet he couldn't help but feel a pang of disbelief.

How could they fail to see the reasons behind his actions? He had held onto the hope that they would understand and recognize the desperate circumstances that left him with no choice.

Within him, there was a storm of conflicting emotions as he grappled with the hurt and confusion caused by his choices, desperately trying to ease the pain they had caused.

"That's not true," Benedict said. The man's voice was unusually serious, surprising Erik.

It was out of character for Benedict to choose a side so solemnly.

Erik found it odd to see him adopt such a grave demeanor, a stark contrast to his usual lighthearted nature. The moment felt surreal.

"According to Becker, Sinisa Volkov, the new top dog, looked after the Heniate. Volkov sent it to New Alexandria to take him out, or at least to make him lose support. Obviously, you can guess who gave him the Heniate's egg in the first place."

"I'm not aware of that. I haven't had the opportunity to speak with him yet."

"Well, you better. Becker is giving it his all to fix things and fight the Blackguards. He also started training everyone, us included."

Chapter 804: Reuniting (4)

To learn that was weird. Erik had never expected Becker to train people in Liberty Watch, especially not after what he had done to these people.

However, that wasn't as surprising as hearing he was training Amber and the others.

Apparently, even Mira joined them, but that was understandable.

Both the Fierce Lioness and Becker were renowned for their extraordinary strength, making them arguably the most powerful individuals in the entire world. Well, aside from him now.

If it wasn't because the Blackguards had many people around that level, even if lower, they would have been the king and queen of the world.

"I'll definitely have a chat with him. After all, it looks like he knows a lot of things I'm not aware of."

A heavy sigh escaped Erik's lips, revealing his exasperation. It was obvious Noah talked to him, so the clone knew what kind of information the man possessed.

Noah's decision to withhold this information from Erik was a deliberate act, driven by his awareness of the deep-seated animosity Erik harbored towards the individual in question, showing his desire for the two to at least have a conversation.

The group continued their conversation, discussing a few additional topics.

Erik attempted to provide the most detailed explanation of his situation that he could.

The process of exposing the existence of the biological supercomputer had been anything but simple.

To let others know about it meant placing multiple targets on his back.

While he maintained his faith in their reliability, the temptation of greed could overpower them, causing them to make an attempt at obtaining it from him. If not now, maybe in the future, at least.

But he was tired, tired of keeping secrets, tired of having to hide. That was especially burdensome, considering they were among the few people that showed him some kind of love.

"Well," Floyd said. "I think this conversation won't bring us anywhere."

"Yeah. Me too," Gwen said.

Erik's impression was that the two reached their limit with him, and it wasn't just about this talk.

To Erik's surprise, Floyd did something that he did not expect.

With a determined stride, he moved closer to him and then wrapped his arms around him in a heartfelt embrace.

"For all that matters, I'm glad you are ok." He then smiled.

"Thank you."

As she neared him, Gwen extended her hand and patted him on the back in a friendly manner.

Although she didn't utter a single word, her expression revealed that she, too, was relieved and glad that he was alive.

In a similar fashion, the rest of the group also did the same thing.

Of course, out of everyone present, Benedict had the most exuberant response by leaping up and embracing Erik in a tight bear hug, almost depriving him of breath.

"I missed you, man."

"Me too, Ben."

Despite the absence of words, the action clearly expressed the relief and joy he felt upon seeing Erik alive and well.

The air felt heavy, charged with a mix of emotions that none of them quite knew how to navigate.

Mira and Amber exchanged glances, their eyes reflecting a storm of feelings.

Despite being aware of Erik's motive, his decision to pursue another relationship in Etrium led to many complications.

Erik stood uneasily between the two women, feeling the weight of his decisions bearing down on him like a heavy load.

It was as if the tension had taken on a physical form, an unbridgeable gap that his apologies couldn't fill.

Each passing second in silence seemed to stretch endlessly, intensifying the awkwardness and the unspoken tension lingering in the air.

It was at this point that Mira contributed to the conversation.

"There is obviously one last matter we should address."

The woman's start of the discussion did not surprise Erik. Being older, she had accumulated a wealth of experience in love affairs, which Erik was well aware of.

With complete vulnerability, she had bared her soul to Erik, revealing her past, her encounters with love and heartbreak, and confiding in him with the utmost trust.

Despite everything, they found themselves in this situation where they had to confront the reality that Erik had kept a crucial part of his own story hidden.

"Yeah," Erik said.

"For starters, you should have told me about this situation. It would have been enough if you didn't share everything, but at least acknowledging that you didn't forget about someone back at home would have been acceptable."

"You know, it wasn't easy. Also, I wasn't trying to make you think I had someone else in mind. I thought I was being tactful."

Then Mira said something. "Don't take me for a fool, because you had someone else in mind, Erik. I'm not stupid. I noticed you keep looking out the window and sighing. It was obvious something was bothering you. Plus, you're not denying it, so it must be true."

"Honestly, I'd be lying if I said I wasn't."

To that, Mira remained silent. "Look, Mira, you know I care for you. I tried my hardest to give you everything. But the situation was complicated. You can't expect me to just forget about Amber."

Mira's disappointment and sorrow were clear in the way her face contorted, lines etching deep into her features.

She sat there; her face filled with dejection, as the realization hit her that Erik still had feelings for Amber.

Her sadness simmered silently, an emotional tempest concealed within, a reflection of the broken trust she experienced.

Instead, Amber found herself caught in a whirlwind of conflicting emotions. Despite her efforts to conceal it, a small smile of relief and vindication played on her lips.

Erik's actions served as a reassurance to her, affirming that she still held a special place in his heart.

However, her guilt consumed her as she comprehended the innocence of Mira, realizing that she was caught up in this complex web of emotions.

Erik's next action sent a wave of hurt through Amber. With a gentle rise, he extended his arms and enveloped Mira in a warm and comforting embrace, witnessing the free flow of her tears and feeling her body tremble with each sob.

Instinctively realizing that speaking at that moment would only worsen the wounds, Amber made the conscious decision to remain silent.

Nevertheless, the sight of Erik cradling Mira caused a storm of complex feelings to surge inside her.

Despite everything, Amber's feelings for Erik remained as strong as they had always been.



Even though he faked his death, she fully comprehended the seriousness and importance of his motivations.

When Erik turned to meet her gaze, his simple apology seemed to hang heavily in the air.

Amber's response was simply a nod, but this simple gesture held the immense weight of her conflicting emotions.

Once Mira had calmed down and Erik had returned to his seat, Amber approached Mira. "Are you ok?" She knew what the older woman was feeling, and her kindness forced her to ask that question. Mira nodded,

"Yeah. I'm OK." To that, Erik felt even guiltier.

Then Amber sighed. "I need to talk to Mira alone." She said.

"To tell her what?"

"This is none of your business. Now get out."

"Bu — "

"GET OUT!"

Erik, feeling tired and worn out, slowly made his way to the door, slouching as he went. He was unwilling to leave the two women in that condition.

However, to avoid putting himself in a pit even deeper than the one he already was in, he obeyed the orders and left the room.

As Erik stepped out of the room, his heart heavy with the weight of the confrontation, he found Floyd waiting just outside the door.

Floyd's presence was a silent testament to the bond they shared, yet his eyes held a question, one that Erik could read all too well.

"How did it go?" Floyd asked, his voice tinged with a cautious optimism.

Erik let out a weary sigh, his shoulders slumping as he met Floyd's gaze.

"It went bad," he said, the words tasting bitter in his mouth.

Floyd placed a reassuring hand on Erik's shoulder, trying to offer some comfort.

"Even if they're mad now, the resentment will end sooner or later." His voice carried a note of uncertainty.

Erik nodded. "I know that," he said, then hesitated before asking, "What do you think, Floyd?"

Floyd took a moment to gather his thoughts before responding.

"I'm not sure if Amber will ever be with you again." He paused.

"After your fake death, Amber was a mess." Floyd tried to be measured, but it was clear the situation had been heavy.

"The only way she could cope with the pain was to train relentlessly. She pushed herself to the limits, using a lot of stimulating serum. She's become many times more powerful than before, achieving results none of us could have imagined. Well, aside from you, of course."

Erik exhaled, a mix of admiration and concern coloring his thoughts. "I hope she can forgive me," he said, his voice low. "From Amber's point of view, what I did was akin to cheating."

Floyd's response was a silent nod.

Chapter 805: Volkov's questions

In the warmth of a room, a man sank into a plush chair, relishing the softness against his skin as he held a delicate crystal flute filled with champagne.

As he took a leisurely sip, the effervescent liquid shimmered under the chandeliers' glow, delighting his senses.

Impeccably dressed waiters glided through the room, effortlessly balancing trays of mouthwatering culinary creations.

With respectful nods, they approached the man and laid out a tempting spread of delicacies: from elegant canapes to juicy, grilled seafood.

With a discerning eye, he selected a few, taking note of the delicate arrangement of colors and textures before indulging in their taste.

The champagne continued to flow, the food never ceased to arrive. That was until someone arrived and whispered something in his ears.

Volkov gave a nod, signaling his intent to leave. The moment he stood up, the music came to an abrupt halt, and a palpable stillness settled over the room.

As the musicians caught his gaze, their bodies tensed, their eyes filled with fear that shimmered like a trembling string after a note has been played.

Without exchanging a single word, he spun around and left the room, the sound of his footsteps lingering in the extravagant hallway.

The grandeur of the setting faded into the background as he walked, his path taking him through a series of ornate corridors.

The walls, adorned with tapestries and paintings that spoke of power and conquest, seemed to watch him pass silent witnesses to the journey.

Volkov reached a narrow staircase, its descent shrouded in shadows.

As he descended further, the once bright light from above diminished, until he was swallowed by the shadows of near darkness.

The air grew cooler, and the ambiance shifted from the lavishness of the upper floors to a more austere, underground world.

At the bottom of the stairs, he entered a dimly lit room. The illumination was sparse, provided by flickering lights that cast long shadows across the walls.

The atmosphere crackled with a silent energy, the room's purpose etched into its bare, minimalist design.

"My men said you may be ready to talk."

Volkov's commanding stature dominated the scene, as his shadow stretched long and dark, casting an eerie atmosphere.

Before him stood a man, his body covered in heavy chains and bearing the gruesome marks of a prolonged and brutal torture session.

The dim light highlighted the streaks of dried blood and the fresh wounds that crisscrossed his flesh, telling tales of unspoken atrocities.

The man's face bore the unmistakable marks of agony and weariness, yet a defiant spark shone in his eyes, refusing to be extinguished.

With a sudden jerk, the man mustered up his last ounce of energy and, with a scornful glance, expelled a glob of spit onto the ground.

The sight of blood and saliva mingling on the cold stone floor between them made their confrontation even more intense.

"There is nothing to tell." The man's voice was barely above a whisper, yet filled with resolve.

"You know. All of this could end easily. You must simply tell me what happened. You were part of the group chasing Becker. Yet we found out you misled them, allowing Becker to flee. The entire group got killed.

All died, except for you. It should mean something, right?"

The man kept looking at Volkov. "I shared no information with anyone and didn't do what you're accusing me of. I just did my job."

"And yet evidence suggests something else."

"Your evidence can tell you anything you want. They won't change the truth."

At that very moment, a malevolent grin spread across Volkov's lips, revealing the dark side of his personality.

"Well... nothing that another session with Dominique can't fix," he said with a chilling casualness.

Dominique, whose name alone evoked an aura of dread, was the architect behind the brutal torture the chained man had endured hours earlier.

The mention of resuming the torture under Dominique's hand was not intended as a threat, but rather as a clear promise that more agony would be inflicted.

"Tell him to do his best," the chained man said.

"HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAH, I like you! I like you very much. But listen, if you think you're the only one my people are looking after, you're dead wrong. We found a bunch of rats like you, working with Becker. Eventually, one of you guys will spill the beans."

"If they really worked with Becker, then go ahead and do it. I'm only vouching for myself. I did nothing wrong."

"Still spouting bullshit, uh? Can't wait to see what your daughter says after Dominique finishes with her."

Upon hearing Volkov's threat against his daughter, the chained man's demeanor shifted.

Fear washed over him, replacing his previous defiance, and his voice shook with panic.

"My daughter has nothing to do with this! She knows nothing, I swear!"

The guy was scared, but Volkov didn't give a damn and just shrugged. His voice was devoid of warmth as he issued a final ultimatum, "Talk now. This is your last chance."

Under the dim light, the room's air thickened with tension and fear. The chained man, once defiant, now trembled, the threat against his daughter piercing through his resolve like a sharp knife.

His eyes, wide with terror, darted frantically, searching Volkov's cold, impassive face for a sign of mercy that did not come.

"Alright! Alright. " The man's words came out in a frantic, breathless rush.

"I... did what you accused me of. I misled the group and helped Becker to escape. But..."

As he confessed, his voice trembled with the weight of his words and the overwhelming concern for his daughter's well-being.

"I have no clue who helped him. I swear it on my life. Someone messaged me with instructions. I do not know who was behind it. The message was anonymous."

Volkov's malevolent grin remained unshaken, his gaze piercing into the man as if trying to discern the truth of his words.

"Interesting," he said, his voice dripping with mock curiosity. "And how exactly did you mislead the group?"

The man swallowed hard, his throat dry. "I... I provided false coordinates, led them to believe Becker would be in a different location. However, that had been useless since they found him, anyway. But I never saw who sent the instructions. They were always careful."

Volkov nodded. The room fell silent for a moment, the only sounds the ragged breathing of the chained man and the distant echo of footsteps in the corridor outside.

"And the ones trying to catch him? Who killed them?" Volkov leaned closer, his eyes never leaving the man's face.

"I don't know who killed them." The man's voice was barely above a whisper, defeat etching deeper into his features.

"I was told to divert the group, and that's all I did to at least make Becker gain some time. I had no part in what happened to them afterward. Whoever helped him tried to kill me as well."

Volkov straightened, his expression contemplative. The confession, while significant, left more questions unanswered, more threads to untangle.

"You realize the gravity of your actions," he said, more a declaration than a question. "Your interference led to the deaths of your comrades, a betrayal that cost dearly."

The chained man nodded. "I understand," he said, resignation lacing his words. "I was wrong. But my daughter, she's innocent. Please..."

Volkov turned away, signaling the end of their conversation. "Your cooperation has been noted," he said, his voice devoid of any compassion. "As for your daughter, her fate will depend on the further usefulness of your information."

"NO! PLEASE! NO! LEAVE BRITTNEY ALONE!"

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After his encounter with the chained man, Volkov returned to the comfort of his room. He got what he wanted, as the man confessed.

Although he claimed ignorance regarding the identity of Becker's helper, the mere existence of this information held great significance.

There were still allies of Becker in the country. However, it looked like they belonged to two groups. The mystery remained as to who these allies actually were, and that was a question he needed answers to.

As he settled back in his chair, the weight of the intense interrogation room lifted off his shoulders, and he embraced the tranquility of his lavish surroundings.

Apart from the butler, who stood at the edge of the room, ready to obey any command, there was no other person present.

Volkov, with an air of sophistication, twirled the remnants of his champagne in the exquisite crystal flute, then caught the butler's attention and made a commanding gesture.

"Bring me my phone." The butler, well-versed in the nuances of his employer's demands, nodded and left the room.

In just a few moments, he came back into the room, holding the sleek, black device with both hands. Volkov accepted it with a nod, his expression hardening as he contemplated the call he was about to make.

The butler, understanding that Volkov was about to make a call that he had no right to hear, retreated to the background without uttering a single word.

Volkov unlocked the phone, his fingers navigating to the contacts.

His gaze distant, he hesitated for a moment, contemplating his decision, before dialing the number for the Blackguards.

Chapter 806: An important meeting (1)

The day had tested Erik's endurance with tension and difficult confrontations, but he understood that there were more trials ahead.



There was a list of people waiting for him, but thankfully, his personal matters were no longer a concern.

However, there was still one task left that weighed on him more than any other. He had to face Armand Becker, the man whose choices had tormented him for years.

Becker, the architect behind the mission that led to his father's imprisonment in an undisclosed place.

Erik's feelings towards Becker were a complex web coated by unresolved anger, emotions that had simmered and stewed.

As the evening shadows lengthened, Erik prepared himself for the unavoidable meeting with Becker. He understood that confronting him was more than just a task to check off.

Erik made his way over to Noah. In the same room where Erik had left him, the clone was still patiently waiting for Erik's return. However, he was alone. There seemed to be something occupying his thoughts.

"It's something wrong?"

Noah turned and saw his master. "Ah... not at all, master," he said. "It's just that I have a lot to do."

"If it's only this, I need to give you another task that is of the utmost importance."

Noah felt intrigued. "What might that be?"

Erik's expression grew somber, his face taking on a darker hue. The idea of his father being imprisoned and waiting for someone to come and rescue him was not something that brought him joy.

"When I was in Etrium, I spied the blackguards for a brief time. There I learned something about dad."

"Seriously?! Where is he?" Noah showed a weird concern for the man. It was the very same one Erik was feeling. But contrary to his creator, the clone was learning about that just now, while Erik had a lot of time to calm down and think about what to do.

"That is what I want you to find out. I want you to send people in every corner of the nation and find that out. However..."

"However?"

Erik hesitated. The words he was about to say to this clone were merely a suspicion, but who was the most influential person associated with the Blackguards in Frant? It was Volkov.

Who held power over the country and potentially held his father captive? Volkov was the one. It was Erik's assumption that Volkov had information about his father's location.

"I would like for you to concentrate on Volkov," he said. "I know he governed a city, Fasard, if I'm not wrong."

Noah had more knowledge on the subject than Erik. After all, he spent months preparing the migration of the guild back in Frant.

To prevent any obstacles to his plans, he conducted thorough research on the situation.

"Yes, it was Fasard. Now he leads the entire nation, so he left the city in the care of some trusted aides."

"Even better. I will provide you with an army, Noah. An army of clones." Erik paused. "The guild members and the people from Liberty Watch need to be here," Erik said. "Besides, I don't want them to face unnecessary risk for a war that is not their."

Erik made his way over to the chair and settled himself down in front of Noah. From the moment he entered the room, he had been standing.

"Besides, we will need our most capable people, because the Blackguards will be there. We can't fight a losing battle."

Noah nodded. "If we assume we are going to fight the Blackguards, then 5000 people may be enough for our purpose. The Blackguards are powerful, but it's not like they are many. It will be hard for the average fighter to mess up with the clones."

Erik wasn't sure about that. "Did June give you the suitcases we brought with us?"

"Yes," Noah said. "June explained to me what those weapons do."

"And that is why I don't think it will be easier, even with the clones." Erik then took his backpack and handed some sketches he drew to Noah.

"With the help of the biological supercomputer, I analyzed the weapon. I drew up the schematics so we can make more weapons. Any brain crystal boosts the weapon's power. It results in small particles of mana mingling with it, allowing the laser to bypass the Thaid's natural mana barrier."

Noah took the sketches. "Bring these to Jabir, Darius and Tyree," Erik said.

"I don't think they've got what it takes to make them individually. But they should be able to build them together with no issues."

"I will do as you order, Master."

"Yes. Ask Amos to increase the mining of the Aclatrium ore, and asks him to expand the tunnels to search for other type of ores. Also send everyone available to hunt for Thaid's. We will need a lot of brain crystals. I want this done as soon as possible."

Erik then stood again. "Where is Becker?"

"You'll find him in the conference room. I'll have the butler take you there."

"Thanks, Noah."

The clone gave a nod before summoning a butler to attend to their needs.

With a sense of respect and a brisk pace, a man entered the room and escorted Erik to the conference room.

Since Erik had never been to this place before, he was unsure of where to go.

The structure was well constructed, showcasing a harmonious blend of concrete and wood.

The building had a majestic appearance resembling that of an immense mountain cabin, thanks to the many wooden pillars that were placed throughout.

Yet, not all areas basked in light; various sections of the building lay in shadows, a clear sign they were still a work in progress.

Although the place was crude in certain areas, the guild's clear dedication and hard work in transforming was quite noticeable.

With each step, Erik grew closer and closer to the door until he finally arrived in front of it. It was closed, but based on the butler's reaction, that was where he had to go.

With a polite excuse, the Butler left, leaving Erik to contemplate in solitude. On one occasion, Erik and Becker had a conversation.

Despite his initial unfavorable impression, his friend's words caused him to reevaluate his viewpoint. Could it be he misunderstood the man?

The only way to find out was through that one method. Demonstrating strength and determination, Erik grasped the door handle and pushed the door open.

Chapter 807: An important meeting (2)

Erik pushed open the door, stepping into a room that struck him with its stark contrast to the rest of the building.

With polished wood panels on the walls and a grand, elaborate table in the middle, the conference room exuded elegance. It was anything but crude.

Soft, ambient light filtered through a series of wall-mounted fixtures, casting a warm glow over the space.

However, what caught Erik's attention was not the furnishings, but the man seated on a sofa near the far end of the room.

The figure was unmistakable, even from a distance. Erik recognized the man from his long red hair tied back in a ponytail and the fact that, even while seated, he appeared to be a very tall man.

Becker had shown remarkable calmness and confidence when he met Erik last time. But now, he looked like a pale imitation of his past self.

His once meticulous appearance was now disheveled, his hair unkempt, and his posture slouched.

A heavy air of melancholy surrounded him, visible in the slump of his shoulders and the distant gaze that didn't seem to register Erik's presence.

As Erik walked towards him with determination, he could see Becker's state more clearly.

Becker was not the same as the man Erik remembered. Circumstances had broken him, and he carried the weight of his burdens with a crushed spirit.

The man's eyes, which were once sharp and calculating, now clearly displayed the burden of deep sadness and preoccupation.

It was clear that the trials of recent times had taken their toll on him. Becker continued to sip from his glass, the liquid within likely offering some solace, albeit temporarily.

The room was quiet, save for the soft clinking of ice against the glass as Becker drank.

For a moment, Erik gazed at the ex-general sitting across from him. A silent exchange of feelings and thoughts filled the air.

Even though there were personal grievances and unresolved issues between them, Erik still felt a twinge of sympathy for the man.

Erik cleared his throat, an attempt to break the silence and command Becker's attention, but the response was delayed.

Erik's eyes met Becker's. Becker seemed to take a while to recognize him, as if Erik was the last person he thought he would see. But his expression did not betray any shock.

"Ah... Erik Romano..." the man turned to look at his glass once again.

"We need to talk."

Becker placed his glass on the table, moving slowly as if each movement demanded immense exertion. He nodded, the ghost of his former self flickering in his eyes. "I suppose we do."

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Erik left the room in an uneasy mood. What Becker told him wasn't anything short of shocking for him.

It was true, in a sense, that Erik had misjudged him. Based on the former general's speech, it was a long time ago he started fighting the Blackguards indirectly in Frant.

The nation had long been a hotbed for criminal activity, something Becker initially saw as separate from the machinations of the sovereign institution.

As he pursued his investigations deeper, he uncovered a more intricate and unsettling picture.

He found out that the criminal organizations in Frant were financed by the Blackguards.

During their conversation, Becker asked Erik if he knew about the frequent kidnappings in New Alexandria.

After Erik confirmed his knowledge, Becker dropped a bombshell: the Blackguards were actually financing these criminal acts.

This revelation didn't come as a complete surprise to Erik, who had observed similar patterns of corruption and manipulation in both Testrovsc's Rest and Etrium.

He told Becker about his suspicion, showing that the Blackguards' influence was not limited to their home country but had spread worldwide, even reaching the faraway shores of the Mur Continent.

Erik was surprised by what Becker revealed next. Although Becker knew Erik's crystal power was only average, he still hoped Erik would join him in the fight against the Blackguards in Frant, just like his father did.

This proposition shocked Erik for two reasons: first, that Becker wanted his help, and second, that his father had once been one of Becker's allies. Not a mere pawn or a soldier, but his left-hand man.

The conversation then shifted toward Erik's father.

According to Becker, Lucius was the one who first put forward the concept of exploring the Mur continent, convinced that it harbored vital secrets.

Lucius was the one who planned the mission, with Becker offering the support, going as far as starting a war against Hin to ensure the success of the expedition.

Becker acknowledged their inability to confront the Blackguards directly, being forced to behave as if they were unaware of their involvement in inciting conflict among nations.

However, this restriction did not apply to Hin, whom they could openly confront, enabling Lucius to enter the country with no obstacles.

As Becker spoke, Erik paid close attention and pondered the implications of his words. He found it hard to grasp that his father had played a role in such intricate and consequential affairs.

Once their conversation was over, Erik aimlessly roamed around the building. He had a lot on his mind.

The most important thing to Erik was finding his father.

Lucius acquired the biological supercomputer and said he had found the origin of the Sinister Cold, the disease or pathogen that caused the Thaid's menace and the emergence of brain crystals among humans.

But was it all? No. The Blackguards chasing him. The fact they captured him and that they were searching for something, most likely the biological supercomputer, made Erik think of one single thing.

Lucius, his father, may have not found out WHAT caused the Sinister cold, but rather WHO did it. Everything pointed to the men and women clad in black, the Blackguards.

<That's why they were so eager to grab dad and why they're trying so hard to get me. They're scared the truth will come out. The question is, would the world join in a crusade against them, or not? >

Chapter 808: News (1)

Four months passed since Erik's return to Liberty Watch Village, marking a period of significant upheaval and transformation.

Under Noah's directive, Jabir and his team received the schematics to manufacture brain crystal-powered rifles.

This started widespread hunting expeditions around the village to amass a considerable stockpile of brain crystals.

The village also undertook an expansion of its underground tunnels, uncovering additional ores beneficial for their burgeoning manufacturing efforts.

This expansion facilitated the creation of a variety of high-grade armaments and vehicles, thanks to the plentiful supply of ores and Aclatrium found within the city's bounds.



The alchemy department, too, was in overdrive, producing stimulating serums in vast quantities that enhanced the inhabitants' powers.

Erik's friends, leveraging the serums and the neural link enhancement technique the biological supercomputer devised, each achieved a minimum of 30 neural links each.

Mira, benefiting from both the serums and Becker's intensive training, closed the gap that once separated her from Erik's other companions, attaining an equivalent number of neural links.

Despite these advances attributed to Erik, his relationships with Mira and Amber remained strained.

The two women seemed to have forged a friendship, yet their interactions with Erik were limited, overshadowed by their focus on training.

Erik refrained from hunting during this time and instead focused on creating clones, ultimately reaching a count of 5000, as well as expanding the number of his neural links.

He concentrated on augmenting his instability power, which now boasted ten neural links, elevating it to  $\pi$  status.

His higher number of neural links was smaller than those of his companions, a consequence of juggling multiple brain crystal powers at the same time.

Yet, he increased his count by 23 in total by enhancing his beast and human shapeshifting abilities, as well as the power he got from Quakestrike.

This progress was largely attributed to the serums, but also to a breakthrough in his neural link training technique, which now allowed him to train up to four powers.

To make 23 neural links in 4 months was something unheard of. However, Erik told none, as he didn't want words of it to spread.

There were changes even in his surroundings, especially in the village. As Erik's guild integrated with the local community, contributing to the village's defense capabilities, it got not only a physical but also social transformation.

Initially established by Erik's guild, the production facilities transformed into communal assets, involving many Liberty Watch residents in the manufacturing process.

A collective effort towards self-improvement and defense was clear through the creation of superior-grade weapons and armor, developing vehicles, and expanding the alchemy department.

The problem meant that defense was also another way to say war. Erik was bringing war to the village, the guild, and the people from New Alexandria.

Erik was in his room, a space Noah had prepared in anticipation of his arrival in Liberty Watch Village. The sound of a knock on the door broke the silence.

"Come in," Erik said, and then Noah, his clone, entered wearing an apologetic expression.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Master," Noah said. "But I have important information regarding your father."

Erik was taken aback by the words. "Did you find him?"

Noah hesitated for a moment. "The clones we sent out have located your father. As you suspected, he is indeed in Fasard."

A wave of relief washed over Erik, mixed with anticipation. "Finally, some good news," a smile breaking through. However, Noah's next words dampened his spirits.

"There are complications." The clone's voice was somber. "He is being held prisoner under heavy guard by a contingent of blackguards. There are at least 300 of them there, and that is without counting all the other people."

Erik's heart sank. He had expected resistance, but the reality of the situation was daunting. 300 Blackguards plus who knew how many other soldiers, just to keep a man imprisoned?

"They must have bolstered their forces, expecting me to come for him."

"It is likely that my actions in Caelora City have led them to classify me as a higher level of threat. They must have realized I was pretending to be Quakestrike and discovered that they had informed me about holding my father captive."

Noah nodded in agreement. "That's likely. And it's why I cannot disclose his exact location to you. It's too risky, we can't afford any rash actions. Even you can't face 300 Blackguards at the same time."

Erik, though frustrated, understood Noah's caution. The prospect of walking into a trap set by the Blackguards was a risk too great, even for him.

But that made him uneasy. The best chance they could get to save his father would be for him to rush there and help. He alone could take a dozen blackguards in a fight. Even if that looked little, it was still going to be a huge contribution.

Noah then shared his plan. "I've messaged all your clones, telling them to go to Fasard to get ready for a rescue mission. We're gonna need many people, and we're getting organized. It's gonna be four months before there are enough people there. We can't send all our forces there. We need to do it slowly."

The weight of Noah's words hit Erik, as he knew Noah was right. This wasn't a mission he could undertake alone, not with the odds stacked against him.

In the worst-case scenario, if the Blackguards found him before he could save him, they could kill his father out of spite. That was something he didn't want to happen.

The problem was that could easily happen if Dreadnought and those from Quakestrike's team were there.

With a resigned sigh, Erik nodded. "All right, Noah. But please, save him," he said with pleading eyes. His father had suffered enough already.

"I will, Master."

Erik then shifted the topic. Erik decided to prioritize other tasks in Frant, as they still needed to figure out a safe way to rescue his father.

"I'll head to New Alexandria then. There's something about the Crystal Cross Gang I need to investigate personally. Besides, I want those motherfuckers to pay for all they did."

Noah got it. He understood Erik's anger. Erik wasn't leaving his dad behind, just finding another way to work towards their shared goals. To get rid of the Crystal Cross Gang would seriously mess with the Blackguards' power in Frant.

"We'll save your father, master."

"Thanks."

Erik saw Noah go, feeling all sorts of things. He was proud of his clone, worried about his father, and determined to carry out a massacre in New Alexandria.

However, there was a problem. Sinisa Volkov was there. While the man likely didn't have the same stats he possessed, it was still true he was Becker's fiercest rival.

If he was as good as Becker, it meant he wasn't an easy target. His brain crystal power was probably super dangerous, and since Erik didn't focus on one single brain crystal power, his mana consumption was likely way higher than his opponent's.

Erik had to train more.

Chapter 809: News (2)

As soon as Noah left the room, Erik found himself in deep thought.

The key to understanding Volkov, his father's real captor, lay with General Becker.

He knew the man better than anyone else. They had been bitter rivals for a long time, despite having been friends in the past.

That was something everyone in Frant knew. If there was someone who could understand what went through the Blackguards' lackey, it was him.

Without hesitation, Erik stood and ventured into the corridor. He had to convince Becker to help Noah.

Erik spotted a butler passing by and inquired about Becker's whereabouts. The man told him he was in the conference room with Richard Stone.

Erik hurried to the conference room. When he got there, Richard and Becker were in deep conversation. They stopped talking when he walked in, and both looked at him.

"Did I interrupt something?"

Richard and Becker gave each other a look. Then Richard said something.

"Not at all, young man. "

However, Erik couldn't shake the feeling what they were talking about wasn't something trivial.

The subtle shift in their expressions and the way they stiffened upon his entry were telltale signs.

It was clear to Erik, because of their body language and the fleeting looks they exchanged, that he had walked in on a discussion of significant weight.

Trying to downplay their talk only made Erik more suspicious.

"Mind if I sit?"

"Be my guest," Becker said.

Erik dove right into the core, wasting no time. "I'm here to talk about my dad, Lucius. Noah finally figured out where he's at."

Becker nodded, with a serious expression on his face. Erik got that Becker already knew, based on his reaction.

"Yes, I've heard. Noah has been quite thorough in his search."

"I want to ask for your help, Mr. Stone, General Becker. Noah's planning a rescue mission. I think your expertise would really help us out."

"Besides," he said, turning to Becker, "You know Volkov, the man that is currently keeping him prisoner, well."

The two men exchanged a glance. After a moment, Richard spoke up, his tone resolute.

"Actually, Erik, that's exactly what we were talking about earlier. Your dad, Lucius, was not only your father but also a friend and comrade to us. We were planning on taking some weapons and heading out to save him ourselves."

Erik looked thankful at first, but then he seemed worried. "Thanks a lot, I really appreciate it. Noah warned us not to do anything reckless. According to him, our best chance is to go in with many people."

"Do you really think we won't be able to save him?" Becker asked.

"I'm not saying you're weak or anything. Everyone knows how powerful you are, but the area is heavily guarded by blackguards. You can't do much against all of them, even if you try. That would be like committing suicide."

Becker frowned. "Those mother fuckers... What do you suggest then?"

"Noah is gathering a big group to head to Fasard. With a well-organized force, we stand a better chance of rescuing my father without unnecessary loss. The only issue is that it'd take four months to move them all there with no one getting suspicious."

"What if we do not have time?" Richard asked.

"Noah needs to figure that out. He's also gathering more intelligence to ensure we approach this as safely as possible. When they arrive, we'll have gathered enough manpower to carry out the rescue without problems."

However, Erik recalled something.

"Besides, I knew the Crystal Cross Gang was involved. Actually, from what I know, it should've been them keeping my dad captive. But I guess when Volkov took over, the Blackguards moved him to his custody."

Richard and Becker shared another look, this one longer, as if weighing their options against the young man's plea.

The idea of a strong, well-prepared attack gave them some hope in a really tough situation.

Becker nodded, the lines of his face softening in agreement. "Alright, Erik. We'll stand down and support Noah's plan if you all think this would be the best thing to do. Your father is a great man; he deserves to be brought back safely."

"Thank you. I know this means taking a step back, but it's for the best. We can't afford to underestimate the Blackguards."

"I'm well aware of that," Becker said.

"Yeah."

"About Noah's plan. What is he planning to do?" Richard asked.

"He didn't tell me much, fearing I would do something rash. But I bet the first thing would be to find out the patrols' patterns, understand how many people are there, and who the key players are."

"Typical. This means also finding the layout of the building, and ensure your father is really there."

"Yes. There is a good chance he really is here. The Blackguards knew I'd track him down sooner or later. Maybe they moved dad to Volkov's care because of this. Them not sending more men makes me wonder if they don't take me seriously or if this is a trap. That's why Noah was so worried."

Becker nodded. "Reasonably. I dealt with those motherfuckers for years. They are as slippery as an eel, and as vicious as a monitor lizard feeding over live prey.

The atmosphere in the room thickened as silence enveloped the trio. Each was ensnared by the weight of the upcoming mission, pondering the complexities of the rescue operation.

Erik, amidst his concerns, harbored a flicker of hope that the help promised by Becker and Richard would significantly bolster Noah's efforts.

Just as a sigh of resolve passed his lips, the door swung open. An unexpected figure stepped into the room, breaking the contemplative quiet.

No one knew she was there, and based on her reaction, she heard everything the three of them talked about.

Amber's sudden entrance into the room caught everyone off guard. The air was already tense before she came, but now it shifted into something worse.

The determined glint in her eyes spoke volumes, leaving no room for doubt regarding her intentions. She heard everything.

"I want to join the rescue operation."

#### Chapter 810: News (3)

Amber appeared like a ghost at the door, shocking Erik, Richard, and Becker with her sudden presence. An unexpected as a shadow in the bright noonday sun.

These were the words she said were what made the three men tense. What Amber suggested on doing was very dangerous, especially for her.

However, such a statement was expected from Amber, especially from Erik. The conversation momentarily halted.

"Amber, you understand the dangers involved?" Richard asked. He knew Amber since she was a child, and his tone was laced with concern.



"Yes, I'm fully aware," Amber said without hesitation.

"This is important to me, too. I want to help... him." She looked at Erik as if she was looking at an arch enemy.

That statement really caught Erik off guard. They haven't really had much interaction since he returned to Liberty Watch Village.

Erik kinda repaired his friendship with the others, but Mira and Amber were totally distant.

"This operation is fraught with risk. We're going up against the Blackguards, and the stakes couldn't be higher," Becker said.

Yet, Amber's resolve remained unshaken. Her determination seemed to only strengthen in the face of their attempts to dissuade her.

"I understand the risks. But I can't just stand by and do nothing. When the others' parents got kidnapped, Erik was the first to help. I'm sure even Floyd and the others want to reciprocate."

Erik, who had been silently observing the exchange, felt a swell of gratitude towards Amber.

It was so moving that she had his back in such a crucial moment, given everything that happened.

"Thank you, Amber," he said, his voice filled with genuine appreciation. "Your help means a lot to me."

But Amber didn't answer him. She wanted to put a distant air in front of him.

Richard, still concerned, turned to Erik. "Are you sure about this? Involving her puts her directly in harm's way."

Erik met Richard's gaze, his own determination mirroring Amber's.

"If I can't trust Amber, then who can I trust? She's decided, and I respect it. We'll make sure she's well-prepared. Right?"

Erik turned to Becker, who was now training her and the others.

Of course, he wasn't shy about training himself. Erik shared the neural link training technique he made with the system's aid with everyone.

Even Becker was using it, and his progresses were increasing by leaps and bounds.

"Don't worry," the general said.

The conversation that followed revolved around ensuring Amber's safety and integrating her into the plan in a way that minimized the risks.

Training and preparation would be key, and both Richard and Becker agreed to assist in any way they could.

They kept talking for a while, and Erik stated he was going to leave the following day, heading to New Alexandria.

A somber look appeared on Becker's face. "Once you return, tell me what is the situation there. I know Volkov well. I don't expect it to be good."

"Don't worry."

Then they all left. Richard and Becker went to see Noah, as he was the one preparing the plan.

If Erik hadn't grabbed her arm, Amber would've done the same thing.

She turned. "What?"

"Are you seriously going to keep this attitude towards me?"

"And what attitude should I use?"

"I don't know, Amber. But you know I don't deserve this."

"That's for me to decide."

When Erik grabbed Amber's arm, the atmosphere between them charged with tension.

Amber was still wrestling with a storm of emotions. Anger was present, but it wasn't only that.

But in the middle of all this chaos, she was trying to let go of the anger and move on from the pain Erik caused. But it wasn't just that.

Amber's icy attitude was all part of a bigger plan, one she cooked up with Mira.

They acted harsh and distant towards Erik, but it wasn't just because they were angry. Instead, they wanted to teach him a lesson.

Amber and Mira, having already largely forgiven Erik for his past actions, had come together with a shared purpose.

They needed Erik to understand they were more than just his accessories, available whenever he wanted.

They pretended to be all mad, hoping Erik would reflect and improve.

They were hoping this would make him see the error of his ways and start treating them better.

Amber may have come across as strict, but she wanted to see Erik change and be more aware of his relationships.

They both tried to show Erik the way, not by confronting him or accusing him, but by being independent and respecting themselves.

They genuinely cared about Erik and wanted to see him grow. They figured that if they confronted him indirectly about what he did wrong, it might help him become a better partner and friend.

"Amber. Please."

The woman turned to leave. "See you around."

Erik watched her walk away, a mixture of sadness and regret clouding his expression.

He felt a pang in his heart, a deep sense of loss as she disappeared from view.

Despite his efforts to reach out, the distance between them seemed to only grow, leaving him feeling more isolated than before.

Erik sighed. There was nothing he could do for now but wait for them to calm down.

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Despite making Erik think she went to Noah, Amber went to Mira.

She and the others were training. Some making neural links with the new and incredible technique Erik shared, others increasing their expertise using their brain crystal powers.

"I have news," she said. Everyone stood at attention and looked at her.

"Noah found Erik's father. He is in Fasard. Noah is preparing a rescue mission, and I'm going to join. What do you want to do?"

The group members looked at each other. What they were going to do was very clear.

"I Will join," Floyd said.

"Me too," Benedict said.

Everyone else did the same thing. Considering all that Erik did for them, this seemed like the least they could do.