

## **BIOLOGICAL 821**

### Chapter 821: The headquarters (4)

Erik settled his tab with the bartender, a gesture that went unnoticed amidst the low hum of conversations and the clinking of glasses.

With a purposeful stride, he made his way back to the restroom, where the lifeless body of the man he had impersonated lay slumped in a stall, without his head and with his blood dripping into the toilet.

After having transformed into a fly, Erik slipped out of the bathroom, his new form granting him the stealth and agility needed to navigate the headquarters undetected.

Erik flew through the grand room where the bar while overhearing conversations. Most were about the 'old times', some about the current situation.

Then he entered the private quarters, searching for the entourage in question, hoping they weren't already in the leader's office.

The deeper he ventured, the more the true scale of the operation revealed itself.

Rooms filled with monitors displaying surveillance footage and maps dotted with pins and strings tracing the gang's influence across the city were just some of the few things he saw while searching the place.

Finally, after minutes that felt like hours, Erik spotted them.

Gus Ridley led a small group through a nondescript door.

As they stepped into the room, the atmosphere shifted. The seriousness etched on the faces of those present hinted at a very serious situation.

Erik glided in after them, unnoticed amidst the group's focused entry and before they could close the door.

The room they entered was bathed in light. A solitary computer stood on a massive desk, drowning under piles of papers, while bookshelves laden with documents lined the walls. It looked like the Crystal Cross Gang's leader was a busybody.

As Erik's gaze settled on the man before him, he instinctively knew he was looking at the leader of the Crystal Cross Gang.

The man's older age was clear in the creases that lined his face and the silver threads that wove through his hair.

His substantial girth suggested a life of indulgence which was the complete opposite of what, inside the room, hinted at him at being someone working late in the night.

Of course, if work was the right word to use about someone who commanded the most infamous gang in the world.

Erik was certain he was the leader. Be it in the arrogant gaze in his eyes, the respectful attitude of those who entered his office and with the authority through which he observed his guests.

<Seems the gang life wasn't harsh on him, > Erik thought to himself, observing how the man's attire struggled to contain his ample midsection.

Despite his outward appearance suggesting a certain lethargy, the sharpness in his eyes betrayed a keen mind, likely honed through years of navigating the treacherous waters of criminal enterprise.

Erik couldn't help but be curious about how much of the gang's fearsome reputation was due to the strategic acumen of this seemingly unassuming figure.

While watching him, Erik prepared to peel back the layers of cunning and brutality that had undoubtedly cemented this man's position at the apex of the underworld, all without knowing his name but certain of his pivotal role in the organization's hierarchy.

That, of course, if Shade's existence and role were just rumors.

Now, what Erik needed was for Gus Ridley to steer the conversation in the right direction. Erik's plan hinged on capturing crucial pieces of information from their exchange.

As long as Gus posed the questions, Erik would delve into their minds, gleaning insights and unraveling the mysteries that bound the Crystal Cross Gang's operations.

"Mr Ridley. To what I owe the pleasure?" The gang leader said.

"You can imagine it, Howell. I came here on Volkov's orders," Gus said.

<Howell? Is this the name of the Crystal Cross Gang's leader? >

"Yeah, I suspected that."

There was a tint of annoyance and defiance in Howell's stare.

Despite not having to hide anymore, and the Gang having key positions in society thanks to Volkov, Howell didn't really like him.

It was maybe his way of managing things, or how he exposed himself too much.

For someone used to dwell in the shadows, that blatant and cruel way of handling things was problematic.

"And what does the mighty general of Frant wants from me?"

"More men, of course."

"Ha!" Howell paused, his laughter echoing in the room.

"More men, you say? As if the streets aren't already crawling with your soldiers and my... associates."

But then he asked a very important question, "How much are you willing to pay?"

"We will pay as much as you ask, if it is reasonable."

"That's intriguing. And you will pay despite the people I send?"

"Yes," Gus said.

"Good. Then I want 10 million New Dollars for the trouble."

Gus, taken aback by Howell's demand for ten million New Dollars, struggled to mask his shock.

"That's... a considerable sum," he said, trying to regain his composure. "I think you should reconsider."

Howell, smirking at Gus's discomfort, leaned back in his chair.

"I thought Volkov's coffers were deep. Seems I was mistaken."

"Howell," Gus said. "You understand Becker is not dead, right?"

"So?" Howell didn't really care about that. He escaped Becker for years. There was nothing he could do now that he didn't have men.

Gus hesitated before responding. "Becker, it is clear had more allies that we knew. We need more men. If Volkov falls, it's not just him who's at risk. It could mean the end for us all, you included."

Howell's laughter subsided as he considered the gravity of the situation.

"Becker's always been a thorn in our side. But he failed to stop us for years. I don't think he would be able to do so with a ragtag group he got from the streets."

Gus hesitated, then spoke, "I shouldn't be sharing this... but the Blackguards issued a caution about someone they themselves are wary of: Erik Romano."

Howell's eyebrows shot up in surprise. "Erik Romano? The awakener? I thought he was long dead."

## Chapter 822: The headquarters (5)

"That was what the Blackguards too believed," Gus said.

"But it turns out, he's not only alive, but has been spotted in Caelora city."

"Apparently, he made an epic entrance inside the mercenary world, to the point he was able to make a guild on his own that quickly took the place of those existing in Testrovsc's Rest. More so, he's showed remarkable strength—engaging ten Blackguards simultaneously and killing many of them."

This revelation visibly shocked Howell. He had once been tasked with kidnapping Romano, but the kid fled.

"And the Blackguards think he might align with Becker?"

Gus nodded. "There's suspicion they could join forces. It's not confirmed, but it's a possibility we can't ignore."

"Why? What does the two have in common?"

Gus understood Howell's skepticism. "It is easy. At first, the Blackguards didn't have concrete evidence that Becker was working against them. But recent intelligence—whose specifics I'm not at liberty to reveal—suggests Becker has discovered Volkov's connections with the Blackguards. This might push Erik and Becker closer, leading them to join forces considering they are both Blackguards' enemies."

Of course, all of this changed little for Howell. He doubted Erik Romano could really be as strong as to reach his level.

Howell could die in a fight, based on what Gus said, but the point was that his real shield was the impossibility of finding him, or so he thought.

<Hahahahahahah! I already found you, stupid motherfucker! >

If Erik could laugh he would have, but his current situation, and fly from, prevented him.

Howell then interjected. "Whatever, it's not like Erik Romano is a problem. If Becker never found me, I doubt he will."

"You should reconsider, Frank."

"10 Million New Dollars. This or nothing."

Gus sighed deeply, irritation etching his features at Howell's steep demand for 10 million New Dollars.

Despite the frustration bubbling within him, the pressing need for Howell's men and women weighed heavily, nudging him towards reluctant acceptance.

The stakes were too high to bargain further.

"All right... But Volkov won't like it."

"Volkov can kiss my ass. Remember, it is not me who needs him, it's the opposite."

Gus's face tightened, a mix of rage and disapproval flashing across his features at Howell's brazen words.

"So, where do I need to send them?"

"At the gate," Gus said.

That made Howell think. If they needed people at the gate, it meant they were likely waiting for someone to arrive. Who could it be? Erik Romano, or General Becker?

He doubted it was going to be Becker. That man was a fox.

He wouldn't brazenly enter the city to attack Volkov. Then, the only alternative was Erik Romano.

At that moment, a memory came rushing back to him. Erik's father, the mighty Lucius Romano, had been for a long time kept prisoner under his care.

Only recently, when Shade ordered him to give the man to Volkov's care, he lost sight of him.

That explained a lot. In Howell's mind, Erik came to search for his father. Too bad he was in Fasard already.

<Ah, this is the bastard who took dad prisoner, uh? And he even confirmed he is in Fasard. >

However, Howell didn't know where Volkov put his father, so Erik couldn't get that information.

But there was something in Howell's thoughts that confirmed a rumor.

One that made many people speculate about the Crystal Cross Gang's existence.

<Howell thought about Shade. So, the guy is real, after all. >

Erik understood that, even if he killed the whole Crystal Cross Gang, this guy, Shade, had the power to make another one.

It wasn't hard to find hoodlums and people desperate for money or other funny products.

Of course, Erik based his assumption on the rumors circulating about Shade.

That he controlled the underworld not only here but also in Etrium and the other countries.

<Shade is clearly tied to the Blackguards. It doesn't surprise me if he has that much power. >

"You really are expecting Erik Romano to come, right? I wonder, what did the Blackguards told you?"

<This guy is very smart, > Erik thought.

Internally, he even rejoiced, as that was something he wanted to know.

What the fuck did the Blackguards told Volkov and his people?

Gus's face stiffened at Howell's pointed question, the sudden mention of Erik Romano catching him off guard.

A flicker of apprehension crossed his expression, betraying his attempt at composure.

It was clear Howell's insight into the Blackguards' warnings about Erik was right based on his reaction.

Erik thought the guy wasn't very good at hiding his thoughts, while Howell got confirmation of his assumptions.

"Yes," Gus said. "You should prepare accordingly. It's likely he knows you kept his father prisoner. The Blackguards assumed he is going to come here, in the following months at least, to free him."

"Why are you all scared of this guy? The fact you assume he knows all of these baffles me. Lucius Romano was kept safe and sound under my care. No one even suspected I had him prisoner. How could his son find out?"

"You don't know him. You underestimate him."

"Erik Romano awakened two years ago. How the fuck could he become so powerful in two years as to kill blackguards who trained for decades? How could he get the means to be successful at what not even Becker was able to achieve?"

<True. I wouldn't believe Gus if I was in Howell's shoes. >

"I already told you too much, Frank. If you value your life, do as I say. I expect your men to arrive in a week. Do not be late."



"I've never been late. You know that."

Gus and his entourage then left the room, with Erik following them.

Howell didn't know that, and he was currently in deep thought.

While he found surreal for Erik Romano to be a real problem, he couldn't deny Gus's words unsettled him.

Howell was smart. Even if he didn't believe in his words, that didn't mean he was so stupid as to take that warning as complete bullshit.

Chapter 823: The headquarters (6)

<June. >

<Yes, Master? >

<I'm coming out. I'm currently following the guys you told me about. >

June thought for a second, but it was clear what Erik wanted to do. <Do you plan on using their identities? >

<Yes, > Erik said. <This guy can meet the Crystal Cross gang leader whenever he wants, and I have some question to ask the prick before I kill him. >

Erik was already envisioning the confrontation, playing out different scenarios and replies.

But Howell was no fool, and the Crystal Cross gang was notorious for its ruthlessness.

He had to make the right questions if he wanted to get what he came here for, among which was dismantling the Crystal Cross Gang.

<What do I have to do? > June asked.

<Follow us from a safe distance. When I tell you, make a distraction so that I can shapeshift and kill them. If the target flees, stop him. >

<They have cars, Master. >

Erik remained silent for a second. <You could have told me that sooner. >

<Sorry. > June said.

<Never mind then. I'll do this myself. You stay there at the Crystal Cross Gang's base. When I'm done, I will come there again in Gus' identity. >

<Understood, Master. I will keep an eye on the place. >

As Gus and his entourage emerged from the building, they made their way to the parked cars with an air of urgency.

The moment they settled inside, the vehicles lifted into the sky, charting a course northward.

Unbeknownst to them, Erik was accompanying them, perched in the car's corner, in the form of a fly.

His tiny, compound eyes missed nothing, absorbing every facial expression while his antennae listened to every nuance of their conversation.

The atmosphere inside the car was charged with tension.

Gus broke the silence, his voice laced with frustration. "Can you believe Howell? Ten million New Dollars is what he's demanding now."

The others murmured in agreement, their discontent palpable.

"It's exorbitant," one of them said, shaking his head in disbelief. "Howell's greed knows no bounds."

However, aside from that, there was a more pressing matter they had on their minds.

"Gus, what do you think Volkov plans to do about Erik Romano?" The question seemed to hover in the car, charged with an undercurrent of concern and curiosity.

Gus took a moment before responding, his gaze fixed on the sky ahead as if searching for the answer among the clouds.

"Volkov is worried, that's for sure," he said, his tone serious. "But he's planning something big to lure Erik away from New Alexandria."

<Something to lure me out, uh? This is likely something related to dad. Too bad I have Noah and the clones on my side. >

Upon arrival, the group entered a towering edifice of glass and steel, its sleek facade reflecting the bustling city around it.

Inside, the lobby boasted marble floors and modern art, exuding a blend of luxury and efficiency.

The building, a beacon of power, stood as a testament to ambition and enterprise.

<These guys treat themselves well. > Erik thought.

"I'm going to talk to Rick. I need to tell him about our agreement with Howell."

The others nodded, and each went their separate way. Gus headed towards the elevator, pressing the button for the fourth floor.

The others dispersed in different directions, each absorbed in their own tasks.

As the elevator ascended smoothly, Gus reviewed the details of the agreement with Howell in his mind.

Upon reaching his destination, he stepped out into a long corridor, its walls adorned with abstract paintings.

He walked, eventually stopping before a door marked with the number "410."

After having opened it, he entered the office. Unseen, Erik, still in his fly form, followed closely behind, slipping through the door just as it closed behind Gus.

There, Gus talked to this guy, Rick, a man of stature, with sharp features framed by salt-and-pepper hair, styled back with precision. Dressed in a tailored suit, Rick exuded an air of understated elegance.

As Gus detailed his encounter with Howell, he recounted the hefty sum demanded for their arrangement, emphasizing Howell's timeline of a week.

Rick listened, his expression betraying a mix of rage and calculation.

It became clear to Erik that Rick's role entailed the meticulous handling of their financial operations.

His fingers tapped on the desk, already thinking about the allocation of funds. That was what they discussed for at least half an hour.

Rick's expertise in navigating their resources was clear as he outlined potential strategies to meet Howell's demands without jeopardizing their financial stability.

<This is boring. When are you going to go somewhere alone? > After Gus was done, he left the office. <Finally! >

Erik followed the man, who left the building. <YES! > Gus was heading toward his flying car, but was alone. That was Erik's chance.

While making his way to the car, Gus slid inside, the doors sealing with a soft hiss.

Alone and unaware of his tiny passenger, Gus started the engine, the vehicle's hum filling the air.

With a smooth acceleration, the car lifted off, soaring into the city's skyline.

Buildings and neon lights blurred below as Gus navigated through the aerial traffic, his vehicle a mere speck among the bustling cityscape.

<System, I need you to take control of the car. Do it, but make it look like this guy still has control over it. >

[Understood. Connecting to the device. Connection established, control of the car obtained.]

<Good. Let's get to work. >

It was at that moment that Erik shapeshifted into his human form.

Of course, Gus was shocked, as he suddenly found himself a naked man on his right side.

He briefly glanced at the man's face and recognized him. It was Erik Romano.

He understood Volkov's, and the Blackguards' fears were true.

The man left the steering wheel and tried to defend himself, but Erik grabbed his neck and snapped it.

[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. 4655 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

The man slouched in the seat. The car didn't lose altitude or control since the Biological supercomputer was controlling it.

While the car was still flying, Erik brought the body to the backseat. He took the man's clothes and wore them.

<Let's head back to Howell. >

Chapter 824: The headquarters (7)

Using the flying car, Erik traveled through the city and came back to the Crystal Cross Gang headquarters.

Of course, he found June waiting for him. The clone shapeshifted into a cat and the Crystal Cross Gang guards didn't pay attention to him.

<Did something happen? > Erik asked.

<No, Master. > He said. <Are you done with your task? >

<Yes. > At that moment, Erik parked the car relatively far from the Crystal Cross Gang headquarters, but close enough so that June was in his Instability Brain Crystal Power's range.

Before approaching the place, Erik hid Gus's body in the car's trunk. He couldn't allow people seeing it, especially not the Crystal Cross Gang.

He jumped out of the car and then headed toward June.

<Turn into a human, > he said. <Gus likely always comes here with an entourage. It would be weird for him to be alone. >

<Yes, Master. >

The clone then went somewhere secluded, and after having shapeshifted again, he joined Erik.

Of course, June's master now had the appearance of Gus. The two exchanged some glances. <Are you ready, Master? >

June was worried a little. What they were going to do was to take revenge against someone that caused a lot of trouble to Erik.

He feared his master could become emotional and kill the Crystal Cross Gang's leader before they got what they needed.

<Yes. > Erik sighed. <Let's go. >

The two went toward the entrance. The guards noticed them and exchanged some nods.

Then they let them enter. After they took the elevator, they arrived at the underground chamber.

June hadn't been there, so it was the first time for him seeing the place.

<This is bigger than I expected. >

<Right? It makes you understand how really powerful these guys are. >

However, there was an icy glint in Erik's eyes. <But not for long. > He then grinned, and June replied in kind.

Then a woman, a member of the Crystal Cross Gang, approached Erik and June with a measured stride, her confidence palpable in the controlled elegance of her movement.

Erik's memory flickered to life; he recognized her from the office next to Howell's. She was his secretary.

Her approach was no coincidence; Erik surmised she had been warned by the guards upstairs about their arrival.

Her attire, both practical and stylish, spoke of a person who balanced the demands of her role with a personal flair that set her apart from the typical aide.

Her eyes, sharp and assessing, swept over Erik and June, taking in the scene with a practiced ease.

As she drew closer, her expression remained neutral and professional, yet there was an underlying intensity, a hint that she was not one to be underestimated.

"Good morning, Mr. Ridley," the woman said.

Erik was surprised by the woman's polite tone. <They are not that savage, after all. > He said to June telepathically.

<Yeah. >

"I need to talk to Howell, " Erik said to the woman.

"I will tell the boss you are here. Forgive me for my rudeness, but he has a very busy schedule. To meet you earlier, he had to postpone other meetings."

"Don't worry. Just tell him I'm here."

The woman nodded and led Erik and June into a waiting room.

The waiting room, despite the nefarious nature of its inhabitants, was designed to impress, to showcase wealth and a keen eye for aesthetics.

Luxurious velvet sofas in rich hues lined the walls, offering comfort and a hint of decadence.

The floors were polished marble, reflecting the soft ambient lighting that filled the space with a warm glow.



Despite its luxurious trappings, there was an underlying tension in the air, a reminder of the room's place within a fortress of criminal power.

"If you will, please wait. I'll notify the boss that you are here again. "

"Good. "

Erik and June looked at each other. <What the hell has a criminal boss have to do so urgently as to leave Volkov's emissary waiting? > June asked.

<Something bad, for sure. >

The duo waited for what felt like an eternity, the passage of time marked only by the occasional shuffle of feet or the distant murmur of voices from beyond the luxurious confines of the waiting room.

As the hour drew to a close, the sound of approaching footsteps heralded the arrival of their awaited contact.

The door swung open, and there, framed by the doorway, stood the figure of the Crystal Cross Gang leader's secretary, the same woman that brought them to that room.

She beckoned Erik and June to follow, leading them deeper into the heart of the organization's stronghold. After some minutes, they arrived at Howell's office.

"You are here again," he said to Gus, or better, to Erik. He then turned to look at June.

"And who is this guy?"

"This is an associate of mine," Erik said. "His name is not important.."

"Ah! Whatever. Why are you here again?" Howell asked, with a tint of irritation in his tone.

Here, Erik had to find a good excuse. "I talked to the higher ups. They want your associates to join earlier than a week. "

"Oh? And how should I find all the people you ask for in less than a week? Besides, why?"

Howell's reaction was unmistakably irked, his face contorting into an expression of exasperation and mild disbelief.

The corners of his mouth turned downward in a frown, his lips pressing tightly together as if to physically hold back a surge of frustration.

His eyes, previously composed, now sparked with irritation, mirroring the annoyance that tinged his voice.

The furrows on his forehead deepened, a visible sign of the mental gymnastics he was performing to comprehend with what nerve they could ask him to do that.

His gaze flicked between Erik and June, as if trying to gauge their seriousness or perhaps find a hint of jest.

"The how is of no concern to me. You must find the people. There is no time anymore."

"What? Why?"

Erik looked Howell in the eyes. <Master... > June said. He understood what he was going to say. Erik turned to look at the clone and nodded.

"I got words that Erik Romano entered the city."

Chapter 825: The headquarters (8)

"Again with this bullshit? I don't care. You have to wait a wee—"

Erik didn't let him finish.

"You know. For a long time, I was scared by you. You seem I was just a small boy, inside a city full of people that could snap my neck with a casual move."

Howell looked at him with a weird look. As much as he knew, Gus was already 50. There was no way he was a young kid when Howell started working for the Crystal Cross Gang.

"What the f—"

Then June moved. Erik gave him the order. He basically appeared behind Howell and grabbed him by the neck.

"I wouldn't move if I were you," he said to the man. Howell, at that point, started getting nervous, but wasn't scared.

"What the fuck are you doing?" he said, looking at Gus, or better, at Erik, in the eyes.

"I did nothing to you to warrant such a reaction from you."

"Ah. Forgive me." It was then that Erik undid his shapeshifting. Slowly, Gus' face transformed to that of Erik Romano. As Howell saw that, he understood what was happening.

"I told you that Erik Romano was in the city, right?"

However, Howell wasn't scared. "Ah. I get it now. Is Gus still alive?"

Erik looked at Howell with cold eyes. "No. But I bet you don't care, do you?"

"No. In fact. But I bet the one I talked to some hours ago was him. This means you killed him less than two hours ago."

Erik then started pacing back and forth. "You know. For a lot of time, I wondered why. Why did you send your men to kidnap me? Of course, then I learned the Blackguards were behind this."

Erik paused mid-pace, the weight of his suspicions momentarily anchoring him to the spot.

His gaze, icy and vengeful, locked onto Howell with an intensity that could have cut through steel.

Howell was surprisingly calm despite being choked by Erik's friend, like he didn't even care about the danger.

"That's the reason Becker never rooted you out, right? You worked for them for a long time," Erik said, his voice as cold as the look in his eyes.

"Well." Howell's head tilted and hands calmly spread, like he was totally cool with everything, even above it.

"If you are here, you must know the truth already. Right?" His voice was smooth, almost disarmingly so, contrasting with the tension that filled the room.

"Just suspicions, at least until now."

Erik couldn't sit still and began pacing like a predator stalking its prey.

The room seemed to contract around them. The air charged with the electric tension that Erik's simmering rage manifested.

Howell was, instead, the picture of composed acceptance, faced Erik, whose every step and stare radiated a cold, calculated vengefulness.

"Now. This is what I really want to know. Who is Shade?"

Howell was left speechless at that, but that only lasted for a fraction of a second.

"Shade? You listened to too many rumors, Erik Romano."

However, Howell's thoughts betrayed him. Shade indeed existed, Erik caught a glimpse of the Crystal Cross Gang's leader thought some hours earlier, and what he thought about just now confirmed it.

The problem was that Howell didn't know who Shade was.

Based on what Howell was thinking, Shade joined the Crystal Cross Gang around the same time he did. While Howell was very good at his job, Shade was even better.

There were many criminal gangs around Frant during that time, and while Shade worked for the Crystal Cross Gang, under the alias of N.H, he went to conquer or dismantle all the other gangs around the country.

Howell always admired him for that kind of dedication and sheer will.

Then it came the time the previous leader of the Crystal Cross Gang died, and Howell took over the mantle.

Though Shade at that point was too powerful. He came back in secret one day and told Howell that the Crystal Cross Gang was going to work for him.

No threats were issued that day. Howell wasn't stupid. If Shade had been able to destroy all the criminal organizations of the country, there was no way he could resist him.

Besides, Shade knew who he was, where he lived, and based on the stories about him, and what he heard about him during their youth, Shade had any means available to kill him with him not even noticing.

It was at that point that the Crystal Cross Gang started working with the Blackguards.

"Where is him?" Erik asked. Howell looked at Erik with defiance. "Are you stupid or deaf? There is no Shade. That's just a myth."

"I'm not that sure about that."

Howell grinned. "Look, kid, I've been in this business for a long time. Even if such a guy would exist, I won't tell anything. Besides, you do really think a couple of questions will make me talk?"

He then laughed.

"It's clear you are an amateur. You see, when you need to make someone talk, you should torture them."

However, when Erik asked that question, there was just one thing Howell thought about. Nokisi Point.

Howell didn't know what the man was doing or where he exactly was, but he was there, in the Band of Giants' city.

"What about Benjamin Kaminski?"

Howell thought about it. The thoughts weren't many, but they were serious. It was almost as if he was more scared by uncle Ben than of shade.

Then the Crystal Cross Gang's leader smirked. "I'll make you a favor, Erik Romano. Never ask about that man to a—"

However, June snapped Howell's neck. Erik gave the order through the Instability Brain Crystal Power.

[FRANK HOWELL 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. 4655 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

On Erik's face, there was a clear look of shock. What he just read inside Howell's mind was enough to shatter everything he knew about Uncle Benjamin, and the relationship between him and his father.

#### Chapter 826: Revenge

A month went by since Erik and June killed Howell. In this time frame, Erik took Howell's identity.

Before killing Howell, Erik realized he had little time to complete his revenge against these guys.

Noah was still organizing the attack on Fasard to free his father, and the clone could call him at any moment.

For that reason, he came up with a simple idea to kill as many Crystal Cross Gang members in the shortest time possible.

It was easy, really. He simply needed to take Howell's identity and call everyone back.

A meeting was the excuse he needed to make that happen.

It would only take one day to kill everyone, but of course, he needed to give them time to arrange the trip, hence why he gave the deadline in a month.

In the meantime, Erik spent all the time he had available to study Howell's papers.

He learned a lot of stuff. For example, most of the guys that attacked him during his outing with the Red Palace died.

The only two who remained alive were Zachary and Death. Zachary died by Erik's hands the last month, but Death was on a mission right now.

Howell couldn't waste the assassin's skills to guard gates on Volkov's orders.

However, the problem was that there weren't many targets in New Alexandria anymore, or people to ask for the Crystal Cross Gang's services, and for this reason, Death had to travel a lot.

Though, by setting the date for the meeting in a month, he should have been able to get here on time. That day had come at last.

"Is everything ready?" Erik asked to Howell's secretary.

"It is. Everyone is waiting for you."

"Good. Then let's go."

Erik, June, and Howell's secretary navigated the labyrinthine corridors of the Crystal Cross Gang's stronghold.

As they approached the main room, the scale of the gathering within became apparent.

The door swung open to reveal the vast and cavernous space of the headquarter's main room, its enormity stressed by the high ceilings and the elaborate podium erected at its heart.

As Erik stepped into the room, he became the focal point of many intense stares.

These were not just any onlookers; they were the gazes of seasoned criminals, each pair of eyes carrying stories of dark deeds and hardened lives.

Erik ascended the podium with a calm determination and a sinister purpose, his gaze sweeping over the assembled throng.

Before him stretched a sea of faces, a mosaic of humanity's darkest facets.

There were thousands of criminals, a congregation of the underworld's finest, gathered in this one place.

Masked and unmasked, disfigured and strikingly good-looking, the diversity among them was stark.

Yet, for all their differences, they shared a common thread—a murderous glint that flickered in their eyes, a reflection of the life they had chosen.



The silence was heavy, anticipation hanging in the air like a thick fog.

Many wanted to know why the Crystal Cross Gang's leader had called for them. Not a few, but all of them.

Whispers snaked through the crowd as criminals leaned closer to one another, their voices an indistinct murmur under the oppressive silence.

"Why'd Howell call us all here?" one asked, his voice tinged with curiosity and a hint of suspicion.

"Something big must be up for this kind of gathering. I've seen nothing like this before." Around them, nods and murmurs of agreement rippled through the assembly.

"He's planning something, something massive."

"Hello," Erik said. To that, everyone became silent.

"You may wonder why I asked for all of you to come here with this urgency."

Murmurs spread. Erik looked at the crowd. "The reason is simple, really. For the first time in our history, we are facing an unprecedented threat."

Everyone looked at each other with questioning looks. Death, the assassin, was among them.

Erik saw him, but hidden behind his mask, his expression was unreadable.

"Someone is hunting for us. Someone who found and kill many of our members in a short time, something not even Armand Becker was able to accomplish."

The murmurs increased. If even Howell, usually sure about the defenses and the tricks used to make their members unable to be found, told that, he must have been regarding the matter as serious.

Then, among the crowd, a voice raised a question. It was a woman.

She had a huge scar across her face, and a white eye devoid of light. She was blind from that side.

"Who is this crazy fella targeting us? Is he alone?"

Erik looked at the woman and he then said, "That's a very important question you raised. The person we are facing against this time is many times more powerful than Becker, or at least this is what my informants says."

Of course, here Erik said a half truth. Becker still had massive amounts of mana compared to Erik.

Even if he was superior in terms of physical stats, a wind blade from Becker could kill him easily.

"Who is him?" Another asked. "It is me," Erik said. Like that, he charged all his mana into his Solid Frostwind Brain Crystal Power.

He made a wind blade supercharged with the frost and wind elements, and added slimy particles so that, if someone fled, at least he would be slowed down.

The wind blade sliced through the air, decapitating everyone on its path.

[MULTIPLE HUMANS 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. 3888362 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

[MULTIPLE LEVEL UPS.]

[PREVIOUS SYSTEM LEVEL: 132. CURRENT SYSTEM LEVEL: 144]

[SYSTEM'S FUNCTIONS UNLOCKED. DNA EDITING AND BRAIN CRYSTAL POWER EDITING.]

Erik didn't have the time to read those notifications, since there was some of the Crystal Cross Gang members who escaped doom, among which was the same assassin who attacked him years ago, Death.

The man hid inside a shadow and avoided demise. Others, with similar powers, or high enough reflexes, dove and avoided the attack.

<June. Forget the others. I want Death's head. >

<I will bring you his head, Master. >

Chapter 827: The assassin's fear

Death had fought many battles during his life. Born with a Brain Crystal Power that allowed him to escape any danger, and to be even deadlier than he should have been with another Brain Crystal Power.

However, despite having killed countless people, stolen countless items, and infiltrated any place, there was nothing he could do to get rid of the man following him.

Death shadow hopped, corner by corner, shadow by shadow as he tried to put distance between him and June.

The clone had a murderous glint in his eyes as he stared at his target.

June had a singular focus: to fulfill his master's wish. And June didn't want to do anything else but unleash carnage, to stain the halls of this place with the blood of his enemies.

The clone was driven by the relentless determination to kill the assassin.

In the unforgiving world of an assassin, survival hinged on foresight and cunning, qualities Death had honed to a razor's edge.

Yet, as he raced through the corridors, a chilling emotion gripped him—a feeling he hadn't experienced in years: fear.

The source of his unease was twofold. First, the sight of someone unleashing mass destruction, effortlessly extinguishing thousands of lives with a single flick of one's wrist. That sight had shaken him to his core.

Second, the pursuit of an equally monstrous man, a demon closing in on him with the silent menace of a shadow at dusk, its presence suffocating, its intent palpable like the icy breath of death on the nape of his neck.

With every passing moment, fueled his mounting dread.

Despite Death's cunning evasion tactics, the gap between him and his pursuer was narrowing.

<Why did Howell do this? >

He didn't know. Erik hadn't revealed his face. He was still using Howell's visages when he killed everyone.

Of course, it mustn't have been him. The act of Howell killing his gang members was not only senseless in terms of diminishing the strength of the Crystal Cross Gang, but it also had negative implications for potential financial gains.

He got paid by people to carry out assassinations and theft, and in turns he paid his men.

By crippling his forces, he would only create damage to himself.

This meant the Howell he saw. The person who asked everyone to come to the headquarters wasn't Howell. But how could he wield two powers?

For now, there was only a thought in the assassin's mind: escape.

He decided to sneak out through the secret exit in the gang's private quarters, a secret only he and the leader were aware of.

Howell was not one to leave his fate to chance. He had ensured multiple escape routes, knowing all too well he couldn't leave just one exit in such a place.

In the highly unlikely chance that someone attacked this place, he needed to get out safely. That was exactly what the assassin was planning to use. His only hope to live a long life.

As Death made his way toward the hidden exit, he felt June closing in on him.

Despite Death's Brain Crystal Power offering a slim advantage in evading the clone, June's speed made the pursuit an almost impossible endeavor.

Each step brought Death closer to safety, yet June's pursuit threatened to close the gap with alarming speed.

The assassin's heart pounded with a mixture of dread and determination.

He leaped from shadow to shadow, his form melding with the darkness as he sought to evade June's advance.

Panic threatened to overwhelm him as he surveyed his surroundings, the walls closing in around him like a vise.

June grew ever closer, and as he did, Death's panic surged.

<Fuck! Fuck! Fuck! >

Death could easily disappear into the shadows outside the building. The problem was here, inside the headquarter.

Here, the shadows were too close to each other, meaning Death couldn't hop very far and gain the distance he needed.

He turned a corner by shadow hopping, but when he turned behind to see if the pursuer was still there, he found him even closer than before.

"Stay away from me!"

But June said nothing to Death's words. His face was a mask of absolute focus and murderous intent.

The gap between them narrowed with alarming speed, the echo of footsteps growing louder with each passing moment.

"FUUUUCK!"

Despite the desperation, Death was almost there. He just needed to turn a corner, open the door, and get the fuck out of there.

<I swear, I will stop doing this job if I survive this. >

Then he did. He turned the corner. 20 meters away from him, there was the promise of salvation.

Nestled amid the labyrinthine corridors of the Crystal Cross Gang's headquarters, the exit door stood as a beacon of hope.

With a last burst of speed, Death reached the threshold of the secret exit.

His hand brushed against the concealed lever, and with a swift motion, he pushed it open; the door creaking on its hinges.

Beyond lay freedom.

However, as he was going to step out and shadow hop, a sudden, chilling sensation washed over him.

Before he could react, a hand shot out from behind, seizing his shoulder with a vice-like grip. The touch sent a shiver of terror down his spine.

Time seemed to slow to a crawl as Death's senses screamed in alarm.

Every nerve in his body screamed with primal fear, his instincts shrieking warnings of imminent danger.

For Death, this unexpected touch was a jarring intrusion upon his carefully constructed facade of composure.

In an instant, the illusion of control shattered, leaving him vulnerable to the threat behind him. The incarnation of death, his.

The hand of his pursuer forced him to turn around.

There was only fear in the assassin's eyes. A palpable, raw and unfiltered emotion betraying the ironclad resolve that had carried him through countless trials.

He didn't have time to react. His mind was almost blank at that point.

He was unable to think straight. But even if he did, he simply didn't have time to use his brain crystal power.

The last thing he saw was a grin on his opponent's face.

A smirk that reflected the feeling of accomplishment the clone was experiencing for achieving his master's wish.

Chapter 828: New System's function

Erik stood amidst the grisly aftermath, his gaze fixed upon the scene of carnage that sprawled before him.

The sight was overwhelming—thousands of bodies strewn across the floor, each one bearing the gruesome marks of Erik's merciless hand.

Men, women, young, old, it mattered not; Erik spared no one in that shitty hole these guys called headquarters.

June went to kill Death, the assassin, while he took care of the others.

Among the lifeless forms littering the ground, he recognized some familiar faces—individuals he had encountered in the past, prowling the streets, peddling drugs, beating up the innocents.

For once, things turned out to be relatively easy and without sudden twists.

There were no sudden revelations or unforeseen obstacles to thwart his progress, and each time he killed an enemy, he felt a dark satisfaction.

Yet, even as Erik reveled in his moment of triumph, he knew that the true impact of his actions would only become clear with time.

The seeds of change he had sown lay buried beneath the blood-stained earth, awaiting the moment they would blossom into tangible results.

Erik surmised this would make Volkov's plans harder. Finding people would not be easy, since he often asked Howell for them based on what he read about Howell's documents.

As for the Blackguards, the Crystal Cross Gang was the major supplier of bodies, people and organs in Frant. Of course, they had someone else to ask for, especially in other countries and cities, but at least here, in New Alexandria, the scale of their operation was going to reduce.

It was at that moment, while he was looking at the bodies of his enemies, he remembered something.

<Ah... there was that notification. System, show me the status. >

[Host Information]

NAME: Erik Romano



AGE: 18

POWER LEVEL: 811

SYSTEM LEVEL: 144

EXPERIENCE: 61863/352202

DNA POINTS: 6200

HEALTH: 12040/12040

MANA: 11970/11970

{Attributes}

STRENGTH: 290

INTELLIGENCE:302

DEXTERITY: 270

ENERGY: 597

Available Attributes points: 60

{Powers}

[Biological Super Computer Powers]

Brain Crystal Manipulation

Brain Crystal Power Extraction

Brain Crystal power Merging

Brain Crystal Power Analysis

Brain Crystal Power Editing

(Allows to change A Brain crystal power to achieve the desired effect. The changes could be about their destructive power, utility, and mana consumption. This system's power must be used with DNA Editing. It uses DNA points and stored energy to make the changes, but depending on the situation, it may ask to undo some of the changes previously made to the DNA, hence potentially losing stats.)

Brain Crystal Power Strengthening

(LOCKED)

DNA Manipulation

DNA Extraction

DNA Merging

DNA Analysis

DNA Editing

(Allows to change the DNA to accommodate changes made through Brain Crystal Power editing. They must be used in tandem. It uses DNA points and stored energy to make the changes, but depending on the situation, it may ask to undo some of the changes previously made to the DNA, hence potentially losing stats.)

DNA Strengthening

(LOCKED)

Analysis

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

Brain Information Injector

(It allows the injection of information directly to the brain. Based on touch)

Device Manipulation

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

[Host's Powers]

FORCE MANIPULATION Bλ1B RANKED

PARALLEL WILLS Bv1C RANKED

STRENGTH ENHANCER Bπ2D RANKED

PLANT MASTER Bλ1B RANKED

CHAMELEON VEIL Bp1C RANKED

CHIMERIC BIOMETAL SOLDIER Bo2A RANKED

INSTABILITY Bv2B RANKED

ASTRAL WOLF Bπ1B RANKED

SOLID FROSTWIND B<sub>0</sub>2B RANKED

EXOSHIELD B<sub>σ</sub>1B RANKED

BEAST SHAPESHIFTING B<sub>π</sub>3C RANKED

HUMAN SHAPESHIFTING B<sub>π</sub>3C RANKED

VIBRATION BURST B<sub>π</sub>3A RANKED

{Skills}

Kyokar hand-to-hand style (MASTER)

(A military fighting style developed in Frant)

Crypt of the Desert Style (MASTER)

(Flyssa fighting style developed by Master Nieminen)

Etrium's sword style (ADVANCED)

(Basic Sword Style developed in Etrium.)

Erik observed the status, everything, as it should have been. However, he went to the System's powers, and then he saw it. BCP and DNA Editing.

"What the fuck?" Erik read the description the system gave him of the power. He focused on some words: 'Change A Brain crystal power' and 'potentially losing stats.'

<System, what is the meaning of this? >

[ANSWER: This power has been created to change existing Brain Crystal Powers. The problem is that is very energy extensive. Most of the times, the user's DNA points won't be enough. Hence, the system will need either the stored energy accumulated through killing or getting neural links.]

<Ok, but why I may lose stats? It makes little sense. How can it change my DNA and bring it to a previous state? >

[ANSWER: The DNA alteration process is experimental. There's a risk of unintended effects. Changes in your genetic code might revert certain traits. It's like rearranging a puzzle; sometimes, pieces end up in unexpected places.]

That made sense. DNA changes influenced biological processes. The system made use of this to change his body, hence his statistics increased. One alteration could lead to others, affecting Erik's overall performance.

"So, it's like a chain reaction?" Erik asked.

[ANSWER: Yes.]

If that was true, and of course it was, this new power may have been a huge blessing, or something that could spell his doom.

<What can I do to mitigate the risk? >

The system didn't immediately reply. It was like it was processing information to find a solution. However, the answer it gave was very disappointing.

[ANSWER: Insufficient data. The power is experimental. ]

"Fuck..."

Then June arrived. Within his hands, there was a head. The clone grabbed it by its hair.

"That must be Death."

Indeed, he was. However, June must have taken off his usual mask, because all Erik saw was an old man with an enormous pair of mustache and black hair.

"I've returned, Master. I've completed the task."

Erik nodded. "You did well, June. However, we still aren't done. I plan to do something else here in New Alexandria before leaving."

June grinned. His intuition was telling him Erik was about to stir up trouble. Though lacking concrete proof, he felt certain of Erik's intentions.

"What are we going to do, master?"

Erik looked at his clone, his creation. "We are going to prison."

Chapter 829: The Prison (1)

Erik found out many things while he studied Howell's documents and searched his devices.

The Crystal Cross Gang not only killed many people working with Becker but also captured a lot. Most of them had been transferred to New Alexandria's prison when Volkov arrived in the city, but some, of course, had been sent elsewhere.

Those loyal to Becker were still many, and it wasn't possible for a single prison to contain them all.

"You drive," Erik said, giving the keys to June.

"REALLY?!"

"Yes," Erik said with a smile. Erik called many people from the Crystal Cross Gang back in New Alexandria, but there were a lot of them who couldn't attend the meeting.

Most of them were those with guard duties, like those working at the police station or the prison.

"So, is there someone we have to save in particular or...?"

"No one in particular," Erik said. "But those men and women loyal to Becker will be a tremendous boost to our troops. I'm not actually planning to recruit them, but they will for sure stir trouble here in New Alexandria, and we could take advantage of that."

However, June was unconvinced. "Ok, but what if they changed their allegiance? What if they won't listen to you?"

Erik knew already what to say. "It doesn't matter. It's not like I will tell them where Becker is. I will only say he is alive and fighting Volkov." He thought for a second and then laughed.

"I bet they will want to stay in New Alexandria anyway, likely to kill Volkov."

"If you say so." June's gaze was, of course, set on Gus' flying car. It was the first time for him to drive.

As they settled into the flying car, June's hands trembled with anticipation, eager to take the wheel.

Since he had Erik's memories, he knew what to do and flying wasn't something new for him, so using the car wasn't even a problem.

The car lifted, and soon Erik and June were in New Alexandria's skies.

Despite his initial nerves, June found himself exhilarated as he moved the sleek vehicle through the skies of the city.

The city below sprawled out beneath them, a patchwork of destruction and reconstruction.

As they soared through the air, June marveled at the freedom and easiness of using the vehicle. A sense of exhilaration coursed through his veins.

With each passing moment, his confidence at the steering wheel grew.

"After this, what are we going to do?" June asked.

"After that, we are heading for Nokisi point. Howell said Shade was there. The problem will be to find him."

While Erik usually had leads about his targets, this time he only had a name. Besides, if Shade was just a legend in New Alexandria, it was clear it was the same elsewhere.

To find him, Erik had to infiltrate their organization or something like that. Nothing new.

Finally, they reached their destination—the prison.

"This is going to be fun," June said.

"Yeah. But keep an eye on brain crystal rifles. I think it's just a matter of time before Etrium will be able to scale up their production and start exporting them in huge batches."

"Understood, Master."

With a shared glance, Erik and June stepped out of the flying car.

"Will we infiltrate like usual?"

"No," Erik said. "We did it until now because I need information, but here there is nothing valuable I can gain. We enter from the front door." He grinned.

"Are you ready?"

"Ready, Master."

"Good. Let's go then."

Erik and June walked toward the prison door. There were people around, guards, most of the time, scanning the perimeter for intruders. It was a prison, after all, they couldn't leave it unattended.



Erik channeled mana and released a wind blade that destroyed the main door. It cut it horizontally, and the lower part fell to the ground with a thud.

"June, take care of the guards."

"Yes, Master."

With that, the clone jumped and landed over the fortified walls. He started killing the guards as Erik leisurely walked through the gate to the inner perimeter of the prison. In the meantime, a rain pour of notification came to Erik.

[MULTIPLE ENEMY HUMANS 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. 208440 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

Erik grinned. He turned to look at June and saw he was already done with the outside guards. Erik pointed at the prison entrance, which was right now opening, letting guards armed with weapons powered up by Brain Crystal Powers rush out of it.

"Look, June, they opened the door for us! Aren't they polite?" He grinned again.

"Very much, master." June stopped to increase the drama his words conveyed. "Should we greet them?"

"I'm too lazy. Can you take care of it?"

In the meantime, the guards rushed toward Erik. "Of course, master."

It was at that moment that June rushed toward the guards. There were around fifty of them, around the same number of guards outside guarding the entrance.

"Stop the intruders!"

"Kill them!"

Though they didn't have the time to react. The strength of Erik's clone far surpassed their own, their abilities barely reaching the  $\mu$  level. It was ironic.

Back when Erik still lived in New Alexandria, his hometown, facing off against a  $\mu$ -ranked soldier was tantamount to signing one's own death warrant.

He had taken elaborate precautions to fly under the radar, avoiding confrontation with such adversaries at all costs. The mere thought of crossing paths with them had once sent shivers down his spine.

Yet, here he was, back in the very place where Erik had grown up, surrounded by enemies who he treated as mosquitoes.

It took a little before June made quick work of them, and Erik got a new notification.

[LEVEL UP.]

"Oh! I didn't expect that."

"What, master?"

"I just leveled up!"

Erik then looked at his status and noticed he didn't use his attribute points yet. "Ah, right. I totally forgot about that. System, pump my energy stat!"

[UNDERSTOOD.]

## Chapter 830: The Prison (2)

Erik and June stepped through the entrance. The prison's exterior was a testament to its tumultuous history, displaying many scars with cracks that snaked up the weathered walls.

The entrance was secured with bars made of mana powered ores, effectively deterring visitors from hastily attempting any unauthorized entry or impulsive actions.

The moment he stepped inside, he realized he was in a lobby that had served as a place for anxious visitors to wait for information on their loved ones.

The walls were decorated with posters that contained words of encouragement, aiming to uplift those who were facing the challenges of incarceration.

However, at this moment, all they could perceive was the piercing noise emanating from the blaring alarm.

The moment the alarm blared overhead, a group of guards swiftly emerged from their posts to confront Erik and June.

Erik directed his focus towards June, a serious look appeared on his face.

"Take care of them," he said. June, with a nod of understanding, quickly sprung into action, demonstrating swift and precise movements as he engaged the guards in a fierce battle.

Just a few minutes later, a new notification popped up and caught his attention.

[MULTIPLE ENEMY HUMANS 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. 83376 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

"Let's go."

While progressing further into the prison, Erik navigated through a maze of corridors that were flanked by offices and other sections dedicated to administrative purposes.

At this location, police officers used to work until the Crystal Cross Gang emerged, and subsequently, Volkov's men assumed control of the area.

As expected, additional guards arrived, but June once again handled them with ease. It was a piece of cake.

"The security here is very lax."

"Indeed, Master. I thought we would have found greater resistance, but these guys are at best around the  $\mu$  level."

"Even better."

They finally reached the designated area of the prison where the cells were situated.

In this place, the air was heavy with the overpowering stench of despair, while the dim lighting created eerie long shadows that stretched across the immaculate walls.

Aclatrium doors were lining the corridor, and acted as a physical barrier, isolating the prisoners from the outside world.

While looking through the narrow bars, Erik's eyes locked with the prisoner's gaze, revealing a blend of despair and hope in their shared glance.

Many of them were still wearing of the uniforms they had on when they were imprisoned, and these uniforms were stained with blood.

Within their ranks, there were a diverse range of professions, including soldiers, military officers, and even police officers.

It was likely they worked there in the past, but their sense of justice was too strong for them to obey Volkov.

Honestly, that was even weirder than the overall situation. The police officers in New Alexandria never made a positive impression on Erik, and the idea of them being inside a prison because of their sense of duty weirded him.

<I guess Volkov's takeover sorted out the good folks from the bad ones. >

He then turned to look at the prisoners. "Do you wish to be free?"

There was a delay in the prisoner's response. It didn't come immediately. Not only did they not know who the guy was, but they also had no clue about what was happening.

Did he come here intending to help them escape from this place? Or was all of this a trap?

Among the others, there was someone who mustered the courage to step forward, his voice reflecting a palpable blend of desperation and longing.

"Yes," he said. With a desperate longing for salvation, his hands stretched out through the iron bars, as if pleading for mercy.

"I've suffered long enough here. Free me!"

The mere sight of Erik somehow had a profound effect on the other prisoners, leading them to break their silence and start speaking.

Regardless of the potential consequences of becoming Erik's slaves, they were so desperate that it didn't matter to them if he demanded anything from them.

However, Erik knew that, even in theory, there would be someone who would eventually betray him, at least in their own thoughts.

Despite their caution and fear of making things worse, they held onto a flicker of hope that they could eliminate him and flee.

Unbeknownst to them, Erik and June were here alone, which they were not aware of and therefore did not realize it wouldn't have been possible to kill them.

After all, how strong one had to be to enter a prison alone and act undisturbed?

"Free me!"

"Help me!"

Voices echoed throughout the space, creating a symphony of sound. All asking for the same thing: Salvation.

Erik nodded. "Then rise, my friends," he said, his voice ringing with conviction. "For today, we shall break the chains of oppression and reclaim our freedom."

With steady hands, Erik unlocked the cell door, releasing the prisoner from their confines. As they emerged into the dim light of the corridor, a sense of unity washed over them, binding them together in their shared struggle for liberation.

"Help us free the other prisoners. No one must remain here." They nodded and then started doing their job.

With every cell they unlocked, the size of their group increased, until a sizable force of emancipated prisoners had gathered, poised to take on the tyrannical forces.

Right when it seemed like they were about to succeed, the piercing sound of alarms filled the air, showing that reinforcements had arrived.

"June, take care of them."

"Yes, Master."

Erik's nod gave June the confidence he needed, causing him to square his shoulders and narrow his gaze with determination as the group of fifty guards rounded the corner.

June wasted no time and sprang into action with no hesitation.

Moving his body, he evaded their strikes by ducking and weaving in between. With lightning-fast movements, June's fists became a blur as he dealt devastating blows to his master's enemies.

Likely, those guys were all ex convicts, and criminals once belonging to the Crystal Cross Gang.

With each strike, he killed a guard, his movements fueled by the strength he inherited from Erik.

June's unyielding composure remained intact as the guards closed in on him, his unwavering focus enabling him to evade their attacks.

The clone enveloped himself with his biological armor, another gift he got from Erik. The armor was so strong that the attacks made by those guys had no effect whatsoever.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAH."

"HELP ME!"

June's skills were so impressive that even though the guards outnumbered him, they couldn't compete with him.

With a final, dramatic movement, he defeated the last of his opponents, causing them to be scattered and left in a state of defeat on the ground.

[MULTIPLE ENEMY HUMANS 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. 208440 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

[LEVEL UP.]

With a sense of satisfaction, he turned to Erik, a triumphant grin spreading across his face. "All taken care of, Master," he said, his voice tinged with pride at their victory.

While all this was happening, the prisoners in that place were left bewildered and unable to comprehend the events that transpired.

Did that guy just straight up kill fifty guards? They didn't know; they weren't certain.

The speed at which he moved made everything a blur, leaving them unable to comprehend what had occurred.

However, the presence of lifeless bodies in their sight served as concrete proof of the situation. What made the situation even scarier was that the monster who killed the guards referred to the other as 'Master'.

The prisoner couldn't understand how there was a guy able to command a monster like that. Someone who killed prison guards with that ease.

Erik turned to them, clearly seeing the terror in their eyes. They were wondering if they made the right thing to follow him. Was he going to be a tyrant? Would he be worse than Volkov?

Every thought about killing him, in case he showed himself to be a tyrant, now turned to dust.



"What are you waiting for?" Erik said. "Free the others."

With those words, the prisoner complied. One by one, they went deeper and deeper into the prison. Erik walked steadily and as he went further in, he saw people he didn't expect to see there, Captain Mary Lain and her team. They were all alive.

"The world is truly small," Erik said. Captain Lain looked at Erik. She recognized him. How could she not? He was Erik Romano, Frant's only awakener.

"You must be Erik Romano," she said.

"And you Captain Mary Lain. A pleasure to meet you."

"Is this your work?" She asked.

"Whose work could this be?"

Emma, a member of her team, didn't like Erik. It was clear to her, well, to everyone present, that if this guy was here, freeing the prisoners and attacking a state prison, he had to be powerful. Most of all, she didn't like the way he was grinning and looking at Lain.