

## **BIOLOGICAL 891**

Chapter 891: Lucius Romano (2)

The interior was a hive of activity, yet it lacked the technological sophistication one might expect.

The corridors echoed with the soft hum of conversation and the occasional beep of a monitor, but the usual hustle of modern machinery was conspicuously absent.

No vending machines stood in the corners, nor were there the typical clusters of high-tech equipment.

Instead, anxious individuals filled the space, sitting on simple chairs lined against the walls, awaiting news about their wounded family members.

Their eyes darted to the swinging doors at the end of the hall, their faces etched with concern.

Hospital staff set up a bar in one corner, selling beverages and food to weary family members.

Erik was deep in his thoughts when one of his clones approached, snapping him back to the present with a respectful "Master."

"We've been awaiting your arrival," the clone said, his voice full of sorrow and anguish.

Erik's gaze sharpened. "Where is he? Where is dad?"

"On the second floor, sir. Room 207. We've made him as comfortable as possible."

They headed to the second floor, passing through less-crowded hallways. The clone kept pace beside Erik, mirroring his brisk walk.

"How is the situation?" Erik asked, dreading the answer.

"It's not good, Master. We lack skilled doctors, and the medical equipment here is, at best, rudimentary. It's still being sourced or developed. We don't have healers either."

The thought of his father's suffering made Erik's throat constrict, especially due to the poor care he was receiving. But he knew it wasn't these guys' fault.

"Does that mean he's... dying?" Erik's voice cracked.

"Master," the clone said. "Noah briefly told us what happened to da—your father. He underwent long and extensive torture sessions; they cut off his legs, among other things. He doesn't even have teeth and nails anymore. He is in a terrible state, and unfortunately, a lot of wounds got infected."

The clone paused before saying anything, "It's a possibility we cannot ignore, Master. Without the necessary medical intervention, his chances are slim."

Erik felt his heart stop. It was weird; after all those years of hating him, knowing that his father was going to die made his soul cry in agony.

The man who had seemed invincible to him as a child, the figure who had cast such a long shadow over an entire nation, Lucius Romano, the invincible warrior, was now fighting for his life in a half-built hospital.

The two arrived on the second floor, and soon after they arrived at room 207, the clone stopped, gesturing towards the door. "He's in there, Master."

Erik nodded, bracing himself for what he was about to see. The clone briefly entered the room, leaving Erik outside, and then he left with a woman, likely the nurse of this place.

Taking a deep breath, he pushed the door open and stepped inside. June stayed outside.

Erik's hand trembled as he reached for the doorknob, the cool metal offering no comfort for what lay beyond.

A single bulb hanging overhead bathed a stark room in a harsh light as the door creaked open.

The white bed in the center seemed too large for the figure that lay upon it—a man who once stood tall and unyielding now appeared fragile and shrunken under thin blankets.

Lucius Romano's body was a tapestry of scars and fresh wounds, each bandage a testament to his suffering.

His skin was pallid, almost translucent, stretched over bones that were far too prominent.

Once full of vigor, Lucius's face had become drawn and gaunt, revealing hollows where the strength of life once lived. His streaked white hair lay limp against his forehead, and his once powerful hands lay motionless by his sides, the fingers wrapped in gauze.

Yet, amidst this image of defeat, his eyes were startlingly alive.

They flickered with an inner fire that pain and suffering hadn't extinguished.

When those eyes met Erik's, a spark of recognition flickered within them—a father's recognition of his son.

For a moment, that gaze suspended all the complexities of their relationship, conveying a lifetime of emotions in a single look.

A tear traced its way down Lucius's cheek, not of pain but of something deeper—a mixture of regret, relief, and a father's pride.

Of course, he learned about what his son had accomplished in the past few years.

Noah, Amber, and even Becker told him about his extraordinary feats.

On the contrary, despite the many questions Becker and the others asked him, the man said nothing.

Noah told him he was a clone of his son; Becker told him they knew what Erik could do, but he said nothing, almost as if he didn't trust them, despite one being a copy of his son and the other being his own best friend.

Erik felt a lump in his throat, but he didn't cry. No, instead, rage shimmered under that worried face.

Still, the room seemed to close in around him, the steady sound of his father's breathing punctuating the heavy silence.

"Erik!"

Lucius raised his bandaged hand, asking for his son to take his hand. Stepping forward, Erik moved to the bedside, taking his father's bandaged hand in his.

It was frail, not as robust as he remembered from childhood. Yet the warmth of his father's skin was the same.

"You came..."

"I came."

"How are you? How do you feel?"

"Without legs... But, you know, I got used to it, hahahaha ha ha ha COUGH, COUGH, COUGH."

"Don't force yourself to talk. You will make the situation worse."

"I know, but now that you are here, there are a lot of things we must talk about."

"I figured you wanted to tell me what that thing is."

Lucius paused for a second.

"I learned from Noah, that weird human worm who said it was a clone of yours, that you absorbed it, or rather, that it parasitized you."

"It did."

Chapter 892: Lucius Romano (3)

Damn, even knowing that it was basically going to use Erik to reproduce, turning him into another biological supercomputer upon his death would have made anyone say it was parasitizing him, and yet...

Yet Erik didn't feel parasitized at all; on the contrary, he felt like he was taking advantage of the biological supercomputer.

The problem was that if Lucius used that word instead of something else; it meant he knew something.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Exactly what I said," Lucius paused for a second. Whether to catch his breath, think, or simply take strength, Erik didn't know.

"Based on what your friends said, you know I went on the Mur Continent. I bet you also talked to Armand, and he likely said I went there on my own choice."

"He did."

A guilty face appeared on Lucius. "Sorry about that; sorry for having kept this secret from you, but most importantly, for having abandoned you in your situation, but..."

Erik didn't talk; he was only looking at Lucius. Rage, sorrow, pity... All those feelings were swirling within him like a storm brewing in the ocean's heart.

"I had a suspicion that... I had to verify."

Lucius's eyes now turned introspective, clouded with the weight of memory.

His chest rose and fell with a deliberateness that spoke of a mind grappling with long-buried thoughts.

Even in his weakened state, the crease between his furrowed brows hinted at a mind that refused to rest.

He shifted slightly on the bed, the rustle of the sheets punctuating the silence.

"In all those years, there has been a single question that has occupied my mind. Why Hin, of all the places?"

"Are you referring to the reason the Blackguards made their base there?"

"Yes," Lucius said, nodding. "It was odd, really, for them to be there. It is true that Hin and the Mur continent are awfully close, and that could be used by Thaidis from Mur to reach our continent."

"That's what they always used as an excuse for them being there. To prevent that from happening," Erik said.

"Yes, but the number of attacks on Hin didn't justify that move. Besides, most of the thaidis that reached the island's shores were sea thaidis, and they didn't even come from Mur but from the ocean between the northern side of Mur and Hin. It just made little sense. "

"If I didn't know better, I would have said that they went there to be ready in case something the average person couldn't fight appeared. But of course, it's clear that no matter how much I try to justify this from a citizen's point of view, I can't. They went there because they wanted an easy way to access Mur."

Lucius made a pleasantly surprised face. "So, you thought about that too?"

"How couldn't I? Noah and the others should have told you how desperate the Blackguards were to capture me. It is clear they were searching for something, and based on the fact alone, they were searching for me. Among the many people, it is clear they were searching for the only one with the biological supercomputer."

Lucius nodded. Back then, before leaving for Mur, the man didn't know exactly what they were searching for.

He just had the hunch that they were searching for something, and if those guys, the strongest humans in the world, were so hellbent on finding it, it meant that whatever that thing was, it must have been important.

And he understood it once he found it. He understood when Noah, Becker, and Caiden told him what Erik, the son to whom he entrusted that thing, could do.

"They told me, and I wasn't surpri—COUGH, COUGH, COUGH. Sorry..."

"Don't force yourself to speak, dad..."

"No... I must tell you this... its important. I asked Armand to give me a chance to get to Hin, a chance to allow me to reach the Mur continent. He did so by waging war. That's how far he trusted in me, on a hunch I had."

Lucius stopped to think for a second. There was a lot to say, but not enough time to recount everything to his son.

"I reached Hin, and after having stolen a ship, I battled countless Thaid's, one more harrowing than the other. I finally reached those godforsaken shores. For a second, I thought I was the first person to set foot on that continent for centuries, but of course, I was mistaken. The Blackguards were there."

"They have a base even on Mur?"

"They have several," Lucius said. "But more often than not, these are just temporary. You see, thaid's on Mur are... they are worse than wyverns, and by a lot at that."

"How did you survive, then? I don't think you can kill a wyvern; not even I can."

"Not all thaid's are that strong, but the average level is much higher than those of the monsters here on Mannard. Regardless, I survived by shadowing the Blackguards. They had guarded routes, places to rest, and supply lines. I went from base to base, hiding where and how I could. Fleeing Thaid's most of the time."

Erik stayed silent, listening to his father's words. He understood his father had faced enormous challenges, much like the ones he encountered when hunting in the forests near New Alexandria or when he ventured to Etrium.

But he knew the scale of his father's battles was much bigger than his own, where he had only fought against lesser thaids.

"Here is the thing, Erik. Ancient buildings were some of the bases on which the blackguards were stationed. They were the remnants of the humans that lived on Mur. What was weird was that, despite the plenty of ruins littered in that hell, they only chose to make camp in some particular ones."

Chapter 893: Lucius Romano (4)

"Yes. They all looked like research centers, and more than that, they all had the remnants of some symbols on them."

Erik realized something. It couldn't be a coincidence. No, it couldn't.

The young man traveled through the vast cave and tunnel systems that the village had relocated to before arriving at Liberty Watch.

There he found thaids and a harrowing monster. A humanoid beast, looking like a thaid, but with no brain crystal power.

Thinking about it, that was weird. Why did a monster like that, as powerful as it was, have no brain-crystal power?

But that wasn't everything. Back in the city's main building, where Liberty Watch has now established its town hall, he found some documents.

The problem was that these documents showed a date that predated the appearance of thaids, and yet, the documents talked about these vile beasts as if they were spotted daily. It was weird back then; it was strange now.

But Erik never found an answer to his questions, at least not until now.

"Was that symbol depicting a mortar and a pestle, intertwined by a silver-colored line?"

Lucius was shocked. "How do you know that?"



"This place..." Erik said. "I think it was another research center for those guys."

He paused.

"I was the first to arrive here. Back then, this cave was home to plenty of thaids and a harrowing humanoid monster. Sometime later, I arrived at a village, and after much time, I made friends with the villagers. We cleared this place and slew that monster. But before leaving the first time, I went to the building a couple hundred meters from here and there. I found some documents.

They all had the same symbol."

"This doesn't explain why you made that connection," Lucius said. "What did those documents say?"

"Most were destroyed," Erik said. "But the few remaining talked about Thaids; they were written much earlier than their first appearance."

Lucius wasn't surprised. "So, you came across one of the Silverline Corporation's research facilities?"

"I did."

"So did I. The Blackguards were setting up their bases there, but it would be more accurate to say that they were actively searching for these locations. I looked around for a long time and eventually learned that they were not looking for the bases themselves, but for what they contained. Mostly research papers."

"Did you have the chance to read what these papers were about?"

"Yes. Some were studies about mana, some about thaids. As you said, those guys already knew about them and knew about mana much before the first thaids appeared."

Silence reigned for a bit. Those guys, the Silverline Corporation, knew about thaids and mana. But how did they find out? When?

"The Blackguards apparently knew about that already, but that wasn't what the blackguards were searching for. The Silverline Corporation completed its research. Don't ask me when or how. For months, I followed the Blackguards. Apparently, they found something, an email, or a document saying that the result of this research was in a base deep into Mur."

He paused, thinking back on the harrowing experiences he had to endure to reach that place. "We had to traverse the entire Lorogia region. The Blackguards could either take a longer route along the coastal line or get through the mountains. Guess where they chose to go."

"The coastal route?"

"AH! Those damned fuckers chose the mountains! Many people died, and food ran out after months of sitting on the mountain's hills. Those guys had resorted to... Well, I prefer not saying it. At that point, I had enough and decided to leave.

I knew where to go, and so I did. In the end, I reached a base. No one had been there in a long time, so most documents were there. What I found out, well, you know what it was."

"The Biological Supercomputer."

"Indeed. They used a human brain to make it, according to the papers. They put a person inside that thing."

"Ah..."

That explained a lot. It explained why the AI was so advanced and why it could respond to Erik as if it were a person. Erik often asked himself and the system those questions, but an answer never came. Though something weird became clear after he asked the biological supercomputer to talk like a person. The AI... it was not a sort of robot...

"So, you found it, but this thing allows me to get more brain crystal powers. We all know that to have a Brain Crystal Power, one needs a brain crystal. There were none back then. You said these guys were studying mana, but the biological supercomputer looked like the result of another research project."

Lucius paused. "It is not the result of another research project; it is something they made after they completed their initial research. Studying mana—these aren't the right words to describe what they were doing. No, they were trying to control it. The problem was that they couldn't... unless..."

"Are you serious?" Erik was shocked. It all made sense. That was why his father said he found out the source of the Sinister Cold, the dreaded disease, or blessing, that brought brain crystal powers to humanity.

"I am. The Silverline Corporation is responsible for the appearance of the Sinister Cold, or at least for its appearance among humans. They were responsible for the creation of brain crystals powers and the ability to wield mana through brain crystals. That was all to control mana, to turn men into gods."

Erik's expression transformed into one of utter astonishment, his eyes widening to the point where they seemed to take up his entire face.

His jaw dropped open, slack with the weight of the bombshell his father had just dropped, and his skin paled as if the blood had been drained from it.

For a moment, he was a statue, frozen in the moment's gravity, the gears in his mind grinding to a halt as he tried to wrap his head around the staggering implication of his father's words.

"But that wasn't what the Blackguards were searching for. Maybe they knew it already. What they were searching for was the biological supercomputer itself."

Chapter 894: What if...

The Silverline Corporation, the same company he found the remnants of here in Liberty Watch, had made the biological supercomputer, but most of all, it spread the sinister cold.

This ugly disease didn't immediately make people get brain crystals; it took some time, and before that moment arrived, many people died.

The Sinister Cold was a ruthless virus. <

Well, based on what dad said, I'm not sure anymore if it is a virus. >

Regardless, the effects of this man-made thing were devastating. This was not a disease but a weapon of mass destruction, unleashed not by nature but by human hands in a lab, tearing through the fabric of society like a scythe through ripe grain.

The Sinister Cold had not discriminated; it claimed millions, from the young to the old, and transformed bustling metropolises into ghost towns.

Its symptoms were merciless. Erik recalled the harrowing accounts he'd read—people succumbing to irreversible organ failure, their bodies shutting down without warning.

Others slipped into comas, leaving them trapped in an endless void. The unpredictability of the disease made it all the more terrifying; no one knew who would fall victim next.

Communities shattered, families torn apart. The world was on its knees, grappling with loss and the fear of what the next day might bring.

All of that for what? To wield mana? But why? The presence of thaids didn't justify those studies because, back then, thaids were not like they are today.

They were neither powerful nor harrowing. Suddenly, his mind was flooded with a thought that rapidly spread throughout.

<What if...? No. It can't be like that, right? I refuse to believe that. >

It was likely that the Silverline Corporation was responsible not only for having created and spread the sinister cold, but even...

<Even thaids. >

Erik never imagined himself learning all of this. These were secrets no one knew; maybe only the blackguards did.

<But if this is true, why didn't they say anything? > Talking about the Silverline Corporation and its role in the sinister cold wouldn't have made a difference.

Only the Blackguards and a select few were able to travel to Mur. If the Blackguards' real goal was to get the biological supercomputer, even telling the truth about the Silverline Corporation wouldn't have made a difference.

<I'm missing something. >

No matter how much he considered it, nothing changed. The Blackguards' actions made no sense other than one thing: they had something to hide.

Were they connected to the individuals responsible for creating both the Biological Supercomputer and the Sinister Cold? Was their intention solely to gain access to their research in order to prevent governments from attempting similar actions?

<Now, I have another reason to get on the Mur continent. >

The first was a goal that was obvious and immediate: to destroy the Blackguards, those mysterious figures who had orchestrated events from the background and inflicted immense agony for years.

His second goal was to unravel the secrets of the world that had captured him since he got the Biological Supercomputer, which was more thoughtful but no less important.

Even if it was a powerful tool, this device had also been a lighthouse, pulling him farther into a web of intrigue and danger. Putting a target on him.

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Erik left the room as his father fell asleep; he had been there enough, and now that he was back, he needed to talk to Noah and see what happened back in Fasard.

Erik left the hospital, walking down the white hallways. As he passed out the door, the image of his sleeping father stayed in his thoughts.

The Liberty Watch was hauntingly empty, although it was typically bustling with the activities of members of Erik's guild and other residents.

The lively pathways were empty as he went to Noah. In Fasard, people likely died.

That was a problem for many reasons, and although he was unable to change their destiny while he was gone, he could stop losses in the future.

Making more clones was now a necessity, not just to replenish their ranks, but to strengthen their forces.

He doubted his personal war against the Blackguards was going to end soon. The headquarters loomed ahead.

As Erik entered, the sound of his boots echoing off the floor broke the silence.

Scattered about the hallway were a couple of his soldiers and many clones, their faces displaying signs of exhaustion from arduous, depressing work hours.

As he went by, they gave him a sad nod, and one of the clones moved forward to give him an update.

"Master, Noah is in the strategy room," the clone said. Despite being weaker and not as smart as him, Noah had a higher rank. He was the first clone, after all.

Erik nodded and proceeded deeper into the headquarters. Finally, he arrived at the strategy room.

Pushing open the slightly ajar door, he found Noah seated at a large table, covered in digital screens that displayed various logistical data and maps.

Noah looked up as Erik entered. The first clone had an alien appearance that many found unsettling.

Yet Erik saw past the exterior to the intelligence and emotion that mirrored his own.

Noah's eyes were filled with sorrow today, a reflection of the loss of many brothers.

"Master," Noah greeted, his voice steady despite the sadness.

"I wasn't expecting you so soon." Erik closed the door behind him and approached the table.

"I needed to see you. We need to talk about what happened in Fasard." Noah caught Erik's eye; his worm-human features were uncharacteristically gloomy.

His usually serene countenance was frowning with sorrow, its foreign features casting shadows of worry.

"A lot happened," he said. Erik could tell by the weight of his look and the severity of his words that this was bad news.

The look on Noah's face alone was enough to prepare him for the worst.

Chapter 895: Volkov's funny activities

Richard's piercing screams shattered the heavy silence, carrying an intense and agonizing pain.

Every syllable was a painful symphony—a building crescendo of suffering that echoed through the chamber and into the depths of despair.

The sound of his screams was so intense that his voice cracked, to the point he could do nothing but make guttural sounds akin to those of an injured beast.

Those were the anguished cry of a man who had been pushed to his limits, the raw expression of a soul that had been beaten but was still unwilling to surrender to the man in front of him.

"AAAAAAAAAH!"

"YOU BASTARD! MOTHER FUCKER!"

As the chains of aclaithrium ore wrapped themselves around Richard's shaking body, their frigid touch tore into his flesh like tendrils.

More and more times, the knife was used. With each stroke, red streams cascaded down his skin, painting this horrible scene of misery.

At the same time, he was gasping for air, and his eyes were wide with fear. The air was filled with the metallic flavor of blood.

As he struggled to maintain consciousness, the room seemed to revolve around him, and the blackness enveloped him more and more.

A man sat on a chair in front of him, his sneering face twisting into a grimace.

The light danced upon his features, accentuating the cruel gleam in his eyes as he savored Richard's torment with perverse delight.

Amidst the cacophony of Richard's muffled sobs, the air was laden with the stench of fear and despair, a scent so overpowering it seemed to suffocate the very space it filled.

The tormentor's laughter reverberated throughout the room like the frightening chorus of nightmares. Every useless attempt against the shackles binding him served only to feed the tormentor's delight.

"Richard Stone. The richest and most powerful man in the entire country," Volkov said. "You know, I didn't think I would have found myself in such a situation with you."

A grin crept across his face as he continued to torture Richard. The man's eyes gleamed with sadistic glee as he reveled in the pain and fear he was inflicting on his captive.

Volkov stopped to allow his prisoner to talk, think, and breathe. Richard remained defiant, his eyes filled with hatred that only seemed to amuse Volkov more.

With each passing moment, the situation grew more dire for Richard as he realized there was no escape from this nightmare.



It had already been two weeks since the Blackguards captured him, and unsurprisingly, they brought him back to Volkov in New Alexandria.

During the journey, he was brutally attacked and left on the verge of death.

He couldn't escape since some people had brain crystal powers capable of suppressing those of other people and were using them against him.

To keep him trapped, they also bound his hands and feet with unbreakable restraints.

"HAHA, HAHAHA, HAHAHAHAHAHAHA."

Richard laughed, but this was mostly because of the madness the pain was inducing him into.

"DO YOU REALLY THINK DOING THIS WILL BRING YOU SOMETHING?"

Volkov smirked as he looked down at the captive with a sadistic grin.

"Bring me something? Oh! I get it now. You think I'm doing this because I want you to tell me something! Unfortunately, that's not what I'm aiming for. Do you really think I didn't know you were helping Becker?"

You really think we knew nothing about your attempt to rescue him?"

Richard was not surprised by it at all. Noah told him and the others that there was a good chance the blackguards already knew what they were about to do.

"You knew, yet you failed. Pretty disappointing, am I right?"

"Who said we failed?" Volkov said. He then sat up straight in his chair, his eyes gleaming with a mix of amusement and malice.

"You see, we lost a prisoner. One that never told us anything, and that quickly proved to be useless. He didn't have information about Armand or Romano. He didn't know where their base was. You, on the other hand, have plenty of information."

"If you think I will talk, you are mistaken."

Volkov chuckled, leaning back in his chair. "Oh, I'm not worried about that. We have many ways to make you talk. This little friendly session between us was just for my own amusement," he said with a sinister grin.

"I have no doubt you will eventually spill everything you know," Volkov said, his eyes glinting with a mix of amusement and malice.

"You are a mad psycho fucker, Sinisa!"

"Ah, yes! Yes! Maybe I am." He grinned

"But that doesn't change the fact that you will talk eventually, one way or another. You may think you're tough, but even the strongest will break under enough pressure," Volkov said, his grin widening.

"And when you do, I will reward you for your cooperation." Sinisa's eyes narrowed as he realized the true extent of Volkov's twisted intentions.

"The prize? Your daughter's and wife's heads will be on this table right here."

"YOU MOTHER FUCKER! YOU BASTARD!" But it didn't matter how Richard screamed. Volkov's smile only increased.

Richard tried to reach Volkov, but the heavy chains around his wrists and ankles prevented him from getting any closer.

Richard's heart raced with fear as he realized the danger his family was in. "You will pay for this, Volkov. I swear it," he said through clenched teeth, his eyes burning with hatred.

With a smug expression, Volkov leaned even closer, his voice dropping to an amused whisper. "Yeah, yeah, keep threatening. Not that it will help you."

The man paused for a second with a crazed expression on his face before slowly reaching for a sharp object on the table beside him.

"Now, shall we resume our little chat?"

Volkov took a knife after having handpicked the one he wanted to use.

As he twirled the object in his hand, a sly smile played on his lips.

The glint in his eyes became more intense by the second.

Chapter 896: Forgiving is better than hating forever

They had been part of the support teams and saw and did many things.

They were not together to talk about what happened on the battlefield but to stay with Emily. The news of his father's capture did not sit well with the young woman.

Richard's captivity wasn't the only thing the clone told his master. He explained to Erik the situation in detail. The rescue operation had been successful, but it had also been savage.

However, the losses they had suffered weighed heavily on his heart.

Friends and colleagues vanished in the flash of an eye—people with kids, people with dreams and aspirations. Gone, like the fleeting smoke of a dying fire.

However, despite the tragic events and the resulting casualties, his father was successfully rescued from the Blackguards.

The knowledge that their success had come at a high cost dampened Erik's relief.

Erik couldn't help but wonder if the sacrifice of so many was truly worth it for just one life.

The weight of guilt from the decision burdened his thoughts as he grappled with the consequences of the rescue operation.

<I knew I only had to send the clones...> Erik didn't like the idea of the clones dying for him, but they were clones.

While he said this didn't sit well with him, a part of him still differentiated the clones from people. That made it easier for him to make a choice, to have a preference.

The Blackguards were too powerful—much more than he assumed. Not even his last batch of clones had been enough to defeat them. They were enemies with abilities beyond conception. They looked unstoppable.

<Fuck...>

As Erik reached the door leading to the room where his friends awaited, a heavy sigh escaped his lips.

His footsteps faltered for a moment, his hesitation gripping his heart like a vise.

With a shaky hand, he reached out to grasp the doorknob.

His mind raced with emotions swirling within him like a tempestuous sea, and with a determined exhale, Erik pushed open the door.

The first thing that assailed his senses were Emily's anguished cries.

His heart sank at the sound of people heavily crying. What made it worse was that he knew who was crying.

Stepping into the room, his eyes swept over his friends, taking in the sight of their battered and wounded forms.

Martha sat hunched over in a chair; a gash on her arm made her grimace in discomfort.

Beside her, Amber's brows were furrowed in concern, her hands clasped tightly together as she consoled Emily, who was crying out loud.

Her tear-streaked face was a mask of grief and despair.

A surge of guilt coursed through Erik like a bolt of lightning.

He longed to offer her comfort, to ease the burden of her sorrow, but words failed him in the face of such overwhelming pain, especially considering he was the reason she was in that state.

Everyone except Emily turned to look at him. There wasn't anger in their eyes; they decided to take part in the rescue mission on their own will, like Erik did in the past. Luckily, no one died, but they got close to that fate.

Erik's gaze rested on Emily, whose tear-streaked face turned towards him, eyes pleading.

She ran towards him and threw her arms around him, seeking solace in his embrace. Erik held her tightly.

"Erik, help him. You must help him!" She said between sobs.

"Please save my father."

His throat tightened. He didn't know what to do; he didn't know if it was possible.

However, he still said those words Emily was desperate to hear. Erik was maybe the only chance she had.

"I'll do everything I can."

The room fell silent, the heavy breaths of its occupants the only sound.

Erik stayed inside the room for a while. He asked his friends how things went and how they got injured.

They told him everything. How they got injured and how the situation was.

They recounted the intensity of the battles, their near-death experiences, and their lucky escape.

After an hour, since he had many things to do, Erik turned and walked out, Amber stepping to follow him.

Once outside, in the quieter hallway, Amber reached out, pulling Erik into a tight embrace.

Their lips met in a kiss that sent a thrill through Erik, his stomach fluttering with a mix of nerves and excitement.

He wrapped his arms around her, drawing her closer and feeling the warmth of her body against his.

This was their first kiss in years, reigniting emotions that had lain dormant amid the chaos of their lives.

Erik's mind momentarily drifted away from the chaos and danger that surrounded them, lost in the softness of her lips and the scent of her hair.

It was a fleeting escape, a precious reminder of what he was fighting for—moments of peace and love amidst a life filled with conflict.

When they parted, they remained close, holding each other in comforting silence.

"Will you really do everything to save him?" Amber asked, her voice laced with worry.

"I will," Erik said. "But I need some time to prepare. If Richard has been captured, he might tell them the location of our base. I have to secure Liberty Watch against a potential attack."

"And after that? What are you going to do?"

Erik knew what she was thinking. "I plan to go alone. Just me and some clones."

"I won't let you go alone, Erik. I'm coming with you."

"Why? Weren't you mad at me?"

"I was... but. I saw it... I saw what you had to endure for years... I... can't blame you anymore."

Erik's expression darkened with concern. "Amber, please. The situation is already too much. If anything happened to you because of my actions, I don't know if I could handle that."

"I don't care. I'm coming with you, Erik. You're not facing this alone."

Chapter 897: Making clones and going to hunt

The guild members themselves handled the creation of the furnishings.

They searched the lands surrounding Liberty Watch City for the materials they needed.

With a robust wooden desk, a couple of chairs, and a modest bed, the room was utilitarian.

All the furniture in the room was manufactured from local lumber.

The walls were bare, save for a couple of maps and sketches of various thaids and their known habitats.

As he sat at his desk, Erik was deep in thought. Right now, his priority was to create more clones to bolster their defenses and gather resources.

"So, the clones would have two brain crystal powers. "

"Yes, master," June said. "I think you should start making them."

Erik was not totally convinced this was the right moment to make a new batch of clones. If he absorbed more brain crystal powers, the clone would be stronger. The problem was that there wasn't that much time.

One of the reasons was that the Blackguards had taken Richard, and it was likely that they would soon attack Liberty Watch.

Another was that, according to what Ethan told him, the thaids' behavior was getting more erratic and aggressive, and they were on their way to Liberty Watch.

Liberty Watch lost a lot of fighters, and those remaining, aside from the clones who were still alive, weren't strong enough to fight the monsters.

Erik sighed. "The situation is becoming more and more fucked."

"Yeah. That's why it would be better if you started making clones. As soon as they mature, we will send them to harvest the thaids' brain crystals and blood. We will kill two birds with one stone." June said.

"Yeah. Then the next batch will be much stronger."

While turning his attention to the task at hand, Erik sat back and focused, channeling mana through the network of neural links in his brain.

Erik poked his finger and let a single drop of blood to drip down it.

An expression of minor discomfort appeared on his face.

While he watched, his mana surrounded the blood, causing it to expand and morph.

The drop of blood swelled, growing larger with each passing second, becoming larger and larger until it reached the size of an ostrich egg.

Erik experienced an aggressive drain on his mana as he did that, even more so than when the Wyvern's flames consumed it.

"Fuck... This is more demanding than I thought."



Erik estimated that producing thirty eggs in one day was workable, but it would leave him exhausted and his mana reserves depleted.

Erik continued the process, making more and more eggs. Despite the toll it took on him, he pushed on, knowing that he needed to create as many as possible to save his village from the impending disasters.

"Is everything okay, master?"

"Yes," Erik said. "It's just that the process is straining."

"I'm sorry, Master."

Using a blanket that he had spread out on the ground, he placed each egg down.

After some time had passed, he had completed his demanding task. Erik slumped back in his chair.

He felt the exhaustion pour over him.

His eyes closed as he gathered his strength. With each clone he made, the chances of surviving the looming threats improved, and that was all the motivation Erik needed to keep going.

However, since he didn't have mana to spend right now, there wasn't much he could do. Besides, he talked to his father, Noah, and his friends. He literally had nothing to do.

"We just need to wait."

June nodded in agreement, eyes fixed on the eggs lined up on the blanket.

The clone was born in the same way. It was weird to see it. "Should we go hunting?" Erik asked.

"It would be better for you to rest. The journey through the forest had been harsh on you, and all that news didn't improve the situation."

"I know," Erik said. "But honestly, I would like to go hunting. The more brain crystal powers I get, the better it will be for us later."

"Master..."

June looked disapprovingly at Erik. "Don't look at me that way; it is not my fault, but the blackguards!"

"Yeah, yeah..."

...

...

...

Erik and June made their way through the exit tunnel of Liberty Watch City. The few guards inside the tunnel saluted them with respect. They replied to the gesture.

The tunnel carved a straight path through the rock, leading them towards the dense forest that encircled the city.

As they approached the end of the tunnel, the faint light of day filtered in. The exit from the underground city was just a few steps away.

While reaching the heavy metal door that marked the boundary between the city and the forest, Erik grasped the large wheel handle and turned it with a firm twist.

The door swung shut with a resonant thud, sealing the city behind them. He turned the wheel one last time to lock it and protect the city from any outside threats.

Once outside, the fresh air of the forest welcomed them, a stark contrast to the stale air of the tunnel.

June, looking around at the lush greenery, turned to Erik with a curious expression.

"What are we planning to hunt today?" June asked.

Erik scanned the forest with thoughtfulness. "I'm looking for Thaid's with defensive and offensive brain crystal powers, plus some with utility. But with the migration in place, it's hard to say what we'll encounter," he said, his eyes narrowing as he considered their options.

The best thing would be to give the clones something that would allow them to fight as soon as they hatch, something that might complement their already high strength and two brain crystal powers.

"The issue is that the Thaid's coming from around the Eldraith mountain range are likely to be much stronger than those we'd typically find near the city. God only knows what we will find."

With a nod, June agreed, and his eyes moved to the thicket of trees that marked the beginning of their hunting ground.

Chapter 898: Hunting in the deep

The creature's wings beat powerfully, propelling it just out of reach of the grasping branches.

"Faster, June!" Erik said, dodging low-hanging branches and leaping over tangled roots.

"I'm trying, Master, but it's too quick!" June called back, his voice taut with effort. The uneven forest floor was challenging terrain for running.

As they burst through a thick undergrowth, Erik spotted the Skraylash gliding towards a clearing.

"There! It's heading for the open space."

"That's even better!"

Erik and June were chasing a Skraylash. This was a flying thaid that looked beautiful despite being very dangerous.

It had wings that were almost four meters long, as well as a shimmering sheen that caught the light as it flew through the trees. Its body was thin and designed for speed.

The color of its scales changed from a deep green to a bright blue, depending on the light. Its strong limbs had sharp claws that were good for quick, precise strikes.

Its long head displayed sharp teeth, suggesting it consumed meat.

It was odd, considering it had a beak.

It also had two bright, striking yellow eyes that gave it great eyesight, helping it get through the thick forest and see food from great heights.

The Skraylash possessed a brain crystal power that made it see better during the day.

While it wasn't a great combat ability, Erik and June thought that, by coupling it with Hais' brain crystal power, the clones would have an edge during future battles.

After all, spotting an enemy before they could even see you was an advantage that Erik didn't want to miss out on, and that was even more important considering they would be able to find weaknesses and strengths thanks to Hais' brain crystal power.

"It's there, master!"

"I know."

Erik summoned a flyssa from hardened slime, channeling more mana until a frosty wind enveloped it.

As soon as he had a clear view, Erik swung the sword and a wind blade sliced through the air, heading straight for the unsuspecting enemy.

The beast saw the wind blade arrive, but it was too fast to dodge.

The blade cut through its body effortlessly, bisecting the creature in half before it even had a chance to react. Erik smirked, satisfied with the outcome.

"Can you collect blood and brain crystal?"

"Of course, Master."

June did as Erik asked and then brought Erik's hunt prize to him. In the meantime, Erik was sitting on a rock, gulping down some water.

"AAAH, refreshing."

Erik opted not to ask June to shapeshift and hunt the creature. Even though he had a lot to do, Erik decided to hunt without all his cheat-like powers and decided to use just one.

For once, he only wanted to focus on the hunt itself, nothing more. Of course, anyone else would have said he was crazy about hunting thaids for sport.

Erik needed to destress, which was the problem. The events that transpired in the past few weeks had been hard on him, and the conversations he had that day with Noah, his father, Amber... All of that made his day very hard.

"Have you recuperated enough mana?" June asked.

"Yes, but it's not like these things need a lot."

"It's true that the surrounding thaids are much stronger than they should be. I don't recall ever seeing a Skraylash around these parts, either. Even less an entire flock."

"Yeah. I can understand why Ethan and those from Liberty Watch were in that state."

This was the first day Erik resumed hunting after the biological supercomputer abolished the quest system.

"System, how many DNA points have I earned through this small hunt?"

"You got 509.4 DNA points and 101880 experience points."

"Awesome!"

"Erik then saw that June was looking at the water bottle in his hands with greedy eyes."

"Oh, Sorry!" He quickly handed the water bottle to June, knowing he must have been thirsty after the long hunt.

"No worries, master," June said with a grateful smile before taking a long sip from the bottle.

"I have to say. We had been pretty unlucky, finding only Skraylash near the village."

"That explains why there were so few thaids around here. These things scared the hell out of all the others."

June paused for a second. "Should we head farther from the city?"

For a second, Erik contemplated what to do. It was already late. The sun was setting, and he was tired and had little mana available.

To ensure safety, it would have been wise to retreat to the city and find a place to rest. The problem was that there was no point.

Yes, Erik would rest and recuperate his mana, but the following day he was going to spend almost all of it making new eggs.

He'd have to go hunting in the same situation as today. He might be in a different mood, but that didn't matter.

"Yes. It wouldn't make a difference to head back now. Besides, it's not like we are not used to staying outside."

June chuckled. "Well then. But at least let me transform into a Galewing and go scout. While I do that, you can rest and recuperate. If I find anything worthy or dangerous for the city, I will let you know. "

"Do as you want; I will wait for you here."

June gave a brief nod and then took a step back. His body shimmered as the transformation started. His body twisted and reformed in a matter of seconds, transforming into the sleek form of a Galewing when it was finally complete.

The transformation was smooth, almost fluid, as if his human shape were merely a mask slipping off to reveal his true nature.

As he propelled himself into the air with a tremendous jump, his wings caught the wind.

As he flew far over the forests, he made one complete circle, which allowed him to gain height, and then he dashed across the sky toward the horizon.

Erik stood there and watched as his clone vanished into the sky, an insignificant speck against the great expanse of orange.

Chapter 899: Self-healing thaids (1)

As the light faded, the tops of the trees shimmered, producing a beautiful mosaic of shadows and hues.

June was able to observe many thaids scurrying through the underbrush and over the tree canopy from his vantage point in the sky.

The area was teeming with creatures, each of which was likely to be something that they would hunt in the future. Due to the substantial number of monsters, he and Erik were going to be very busy, maybe much more so than they had expected.

<This is worse than I thought. >

Indeed, it was, because among the thaids June was seeing around, the weakest ones were Erendus, and if a thaid with 72 points in strength was the weakest, he couldn't imagine what the strongest ones were going to be.

While scanning the terrain, June's keen eyes caught a slight movement among the foliage.

<What was that? >

June saw something moving, but he wasn't sure of what it was; he didn't see it well enough. However, something was screaming inside his mind—something that told him that whatever he saw was dangerous.

He turned around and started circling in the sky, hoping to see what had caught his attention earlier, ready to react if needed.

Then he saw it. Behind the cover of its camouflage fur, there was a creature that did not conform to the typical profile of the surrounding flora and animals.

It had a muscular and stocky body, and its iridescent fur shimmered to mirror the surrounding landscape.

It was a quadruped of medium size. The monster moved at a methodical and slow pace, its thick coat rippling with each step.

Occasionally, its little, rounded ears would twitch, taking up even the most inaudible noises that the jungle offered.

<Is that...? >

June's heart raced. He wasn't sure of what he was seeing, but if he was not mistaken, then they were all in serious trouble unless Erik intervened. He realized what he might have been looking at. A Hevadrin.

This was a rare find—a creature known for its incredible self-healing abilities, which would be invaluable for Erik or his clones.



The problem was, these creatures didn't merely live around the Eldraith mountain range; they lived IN there.

This meant the beast was powerful, and anything that could live around a wyvern had to be strong.

<This is serious, really serious... >

June made a fast spin in the air, turning around and going back the way he had come. He needed to ask Erik's opinion and wanted to be certain that he wasn't exaggerating.

June moved ahead at a faster pace as a result of the severity of the finding he had made.

Liberty Watch stood defenseless against such a beast, lacking shimmering walls or enough guards, making it an easy target for destruction by the Hevadrin.

Pushing his wings to their limits, June cut through the air, each beat driving him faster towards where he had left Erik.

The shadows lengthened as the sun kept dipping below the horizon, making the forest darker with each passing minute.

While Erik was watching the sky get darker, he noticed June's hurried return.

That June had left in less than ten minutes, which was a significantly faster time than what was expected for such a regular patrol, gave him the feeling that something was wrong.

Erik established a link using his Instability brain crystal power.

"June, why are you back already?"

Erik was struck by June's thoughts like a wave.

"Master, I've spotted something... I think it's a Hevadrin. We might have a big problem."

Erik's eyes narrowed. "Are you certain it was a Hevadrin and not something else?"

"I'm not sure, but I'm pretty confident. I wanted to ask for your opinion, hoping to be mistaken."

"You did well. Land now; I need to get on your back. Take me to where you saw it; we can't leave this thing around Liberty Watch."

Under the request, June descended and landed a few minutes later near Erik. After that, the clone took off with a lot of wingbeats, cutting through the icy air as it made its way back to the location where the Hevadrin had been located.

As they flew, Erik mentally prepared himself for the fight to come. Finding a Hevadrin was no small matter and made Erik quite anxious.

These creatures were not only hard to meet but extremely dangerous.

<Yes... but...>

But they had self-healing powers. This was what made Hevadrins so harrowing to fight.

Well, aside from their monstrous strength and speed, of course.

Their brain crystal power was strong. It couldn't heal others, but its self-healing power made it so the creature could survive most of the encounters without problems.

Of course, Hevadrins kept away from wyverns. There was no amount of self-healing that could save it from those flames, yet few creatures could kill one. For sure, humans never did, and that was why people didn't know how many neural links those things had.

<If we kill it, what should we do with its brain crystal power? >

Erik was unsure of what to do. On the one hand, keeping the power would be a massive boost to his powers, as his survival chances against the blackguards were going to increase.

<Maybe it would be better if you kept this, master. The other clones will have the same opinion. >

<But this would be useful for them. Making them harder to kill will make them much more effective on a battlefield. >

Erik considered using the new powers of the biological's supercomputer to transform it into a standard healing power, but if he needed to spend thousands of points for this modification, he wouldn't have sufficient time to accumulate enough points before departing to rescue Richard.

<It's true, Master. But remember that your well-being is what we want to ensure. We don't care about battles; we only want to realize your wishes. Though we only have one, and that is that you stay alive. >

June kept flying, but it was clear he was reaching the area where he spotted the beast judging by his look.

Chapter 900: Self-healing thaid (2)

<There, > June said. He sent a mental image of what he was looking at, and Erik gave it a look without losing time. Erik saw a figure moving through the forest.

He tried to make out the beast's details. The vegetation and the creature's thick fur made it difficult to get a clear look, but the size and gait were consistent with a Hevadrin.

"Land away from it," Erik said. "We'll approach on foot and observe it first before engaging."

June angled his wings and descended, setting down in a small clearing a fair distance from the creature's location. Erik slid off his clone's back, then June turned human again.

While crouching in the undergrowth, they made their way to the creature's location.

<You were right. >

Erik's gaze remained fixed on the Hevadrin. The creature's powerful frame and resilient hide were visible now, and Erik felt a flicker of unease.

These beasts were difficult to kill, with their regenerative abilities making them tough opponents.

<You did well telling me about this. >

<Thanks, Master. Are you going to kill it now? >

<Yes, > Erik said. <I can't let this thing roam so close to Liberty Watch. If it finds the underground city, it would be a disaster. >

June nodded, but there was concern in his eyes. <What about your mana? Do you have enough? That thing is powerful...>

Erik bit his lip. <Not as much as I would like, but... enough to kill that thing. Based on what people say, a Hevadrin should have around 200 strength points. >

It was true Erik wanted to kill the Hevadrin for Liberty Watch's sake, but saying it also wasn't for its brain crystal power would be a lie.

The Hevadrin's brain crystal would be an invaluable asset. He still had to decide whether to give it to the clones or keep it, but regardless, he had to get his hands on it.

<Stay back. >

Erik started channeling mana, and soon, a flyssa made of hardened slime appeared in his hands. Erik didn't imbue it with frost or wind power; he couldn't use that much mana now.

The man crept closer to the Hevadrin, careful not to make a sound. The creature's fur helped it blend into the forest surroundings, but its eyes remained alert.

Staying downwind, Erik drew closer, his flyssa ready. When he was within striking distance, he stilled his racing heart and studied his target.

Then Erik lunged, his blade slicing through the air. But the Hevadrin heard the foliage rustling and dodged to the side.

It spun to face its assailant, looking at Erik with an unconcerned expression.

"Fuck, this is going to take a while."

Erik charged the beast and jabbed it with the flyssa. His attack landed, but it wasn't enough to kill the beast.

The Hevadrin used his wondrous brain crystal power to close the wound in a matter of seconds.

"June! This is really going to take a while!"

Erik tried to circle the creature, but being wounded made it wary. The Hevadrin most likely had strong healing powers, but it was also physically very strong.

Injuring the creature was not a simple task, yet the creature before him had no trouble inflicting the same on him.

Erik was looking for an opening, but the beast spun, backstepped, and never lost sight of Erik. Not only was it strong, it was also smart.

The Hevadrin then charged.

"Shit."

It was fast—insanely so at that—but nothing Erik couldn't handle. However, when Erik tried to escape the beast's rampage, it used its hind legs to strike him.

"Ah!"

The impact was powerful enough to make the young man fly several meters in the air and crash to the ground; the wind knocked out of him.

Before he could right himself, the creature tried to stomp his head, but Erik got out of harm's way by using his powerful arms to launch himself meters away from the beast.

However, the hit he took was catastrophic. It was far more destructive than those the blackguards' made on Caelora City because they lacked the Hevadrin's might and depended on their numerical advantage and special brain crystal powers.

Erik lay where he landed, struggling to catch his breath after having the wind knocked out of him.

Every inhale sent a fresh wave of pain through his sides, but he pushed past it. He had to get up.

And he did, but not before having spat blood onto the forest floor.

"This thing is stronger than I thought."

Erik had been complacent. He knew how strong the Hevadrins were, but they shouldn't have been too strong to pose a problem. However, this creature was not normal. It was too strong.

<System, scan it! >

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Creature Name: Hevadrin

Brain Crystal Power: Self-Healing

Physical Characteristics: A Hevadrin is a quadruped creature with a thick coat of short fur that changes color depending on its environment, aiding in camouflage. Its body is big and stocky, geared toward endurance rather than speed, yet its strength is immense. The Hevadrin's main distinguishing characteristic is its brain crystal power, which allows it to heal its wound.

Small, rounded ears sit atop its broad head, and its eyes are small yet perceptive, appropriate to its mostly nocturnal lifestyle. It possesses a short, strong tail that aids in balance in navigating difficult terrain and fighting other species.

Ecology: Hevadrin lives in thickly forested areas, where its ability to heal quickly helps survive in the face of several dangers. It is mainly herbivorous, eating plants, roots, and, on occasion, insects and meat.

{Attributes}

STRENGTH: 280

INTELLIGENCE: 4

DEXTERITY: 229

ENERGY: 900

{Others}

Power Level: 477

Estimated Experience: 20692 EXP per kill

Neural Links: 57

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"WHAT THE FUCK?!"

Erik couldn't say... couldn't even think of other words. This beast was strong—too strong, to the point where it could contend even with wyverns, at least in theory. But that wasn't what shocked the young man.

"THIS THING HAS 57 NEURAL LINKS!"

That was unheard of. Thaid's followed a similar logic to humans, and no one had ever seen a creature with not 54 but 57 neural links.

Erik had seen wyverns, but those things were inconceivably powerful. He never got close enough to scan them, but at this point, everything made sense. 54 neural links was not the limit, at least not for Thaid's.

"Is this a sick joke?!"

"WHAT'S HAPPENING, MASTER?!"

"JUNE, DON'T COME HERE!"

But why was such a creature here? What could have possibly pushed it this far? The Cerulean bird? If that were true, Erik underestimated too much the strength that beast possessed.

<NO! IT'S NOT JUST THAT; EVERY FUCKING CREATURE ON THE MUR CONTINENT MIGHT HAVE THIS INSANE LEVEL OF STRENGTH!>