

BIOLOGICAL 111

Chapter 111: The Plant Hugger's power (2)

"Sure..." Erik said. Immediately he started channeling mana through his body. He felt it coursing through his neural links and slowly spread inside his body.

Soon after, a heat wave flooded over him; the area around them became humid once Erik released his mana into the atmosphere.

Immediately, the surroundings were affected by his power. The flowers started blooming and growing in size; many branches started coming out of them, multiplying their number several folds.

The branches started blooming soon after birthing flowers of many colors and shapes. The petals' hues became much more vivid and as if they were saturated with life.

Soon after, the scent of flowers started filling the air around Erik and Amber. A few insects also appeared to enjoy this sudden change, for they began buzzing around while flitting about from one flower to another.

The trees grew stronger, taller, and thicker, and their colors became vibrant green and brown. Their roots got longer, too so did those of the other plants surrounding them.

Some bushes sprouted new shoots here and there, adding to the greenery all around. But what really amazed the awakener was the tree with red leaves. The number of its branches increased many times, and many leaves sprouted.

Now that most of these new buds had bloomed, some even started budding on top of each other, forming a kind of canopy above the rest of the plant.

More importantly, though, the smell of woody fragrance reached Erik's nose when he got closer to the trunk. There wasn't any sign of rot or decay anywhere near the bark. The tree looked majestic.

Amber was mesmerized by the view, as it was like the god of nature descended into the mortal plane. She stared wide-eyed at Erik and the effect of his power on the vegetation.

"This is amazing!" Amber shouted, visibly moved. Her eyes glistened, and her face beamed with happiness. She wondered why people said Erik's power was useless. She knew it was because of the Jorm scale, but still, she couldn't possibly say this was a useless power since it proved otherwise. It wasn't worthless. No, it was the embodiment of life.

The young woman looked at Erik, and a warm, gentle smile blossomed. Erik smiled back at her.

This was the first time someone from the school said something good about his birth power. The only one who said so before was Mister Fox. There was something special about Amber, something Erik couldn't quite explain.

Maybe it was her cheerful personality, or maybe her kindness. Indeed, he appreciated both these qualities and understood why people liked her besides her physical appearance.

Though, as she saw the young woman smiling, his thoughts trailed back to the girl he met at the party the previous day. He couldn't forget her.

<Emily, was her name...> the young man thought, and he quickly lost himself in her memories. After a while, he snapped out of his trance due to Amber calling him.

"Erik!"

"What?" the young man replied.

"Nothing, I was trying to talk to you," Amber said.

"Sorry. What did you need?"

"Nothing important..." Amber said.

The two kept silent for a couple of minutes, watching the vegetation surrounding them with glistening eyes.

"Hey, Amber..." Erik said.

"What?" She asked.

"I never asked you why you decided to become friends with me..."

Amber didn't say anything for some minutes, as the truth wasn't exactly good to hear.

"To be honest, Erik, initially, I was only sorry for you..." Amber said once she gathered the courage to talk. Erik remained silent, learning that was not simple. He felt embarrassed, dejected, and slightly angry.

"Once I heard you did awaken a new power, I thought people would stop mistreating you, but I was wrong. I underestimated human malice. So, I decided to be your friend..."

Erik remained silent. Hearing these things didn't make him feel good at all. The young man wanted to ask many things to the woman. For example, if she took pity on him, why didn't she stop Logan, Conal, and Orson from bullying him? Why didn't she approach him before he awakened?

At that moment, Erik started to think that Amber may have approached him for opportunistic reasons and not because she took pity on him as she was saying. He already suspected that, but he was too happy he finally had some friends that he rejected the reality before his eyes.

But here was the problem, Gwen, Floyd, and Amber were his only friends, and he was also currently living in Amber's mansion. Should he quit his friendship with them, he would be alone again without a roof over his head. Besides, as things were currently, could he really say there was no friendship between them at all?

Multiple times Gwen, Floyd, and especially Amber showed worry for his well-being, and several times they did give him advice. They paid for his meals countless times, and Amber was even hosting him at her house,

"I know how all of this sounds, Erik, but I'm not your friend anymore because I feel sorry for you," Amber suddenly said.

"If you say so..." Erik said. Amber hugged the young awakener tightly and then patted his back.

"Let's go back inside," she said.

"All right..."

Later Erik went to his room. He was planning to develop his neural links before going to bed. Despite being in a very sour mood, he decided to keep training, as only through power could he achieve what he wanted. He decided he wouldn't let his emotion stop him from reaching his goals. So, he sat on his bed and put himself into the lotus position.

Erik paid sole concentration to the activity at hand for hours. Weaving the mana inside his brain like he was making a wicker basket, the young man concentrated on every detail.

As Erik continued to channel mana from the crystal to the brain, he became aware that he was beginning to feel something else in addition to the flow of mana.

It felt exactly the same as the last time he made a new neural link. The sensation only increased. The mana inside his brain swirled and flowed vigorously around the neurons.

And when Erik felt the flow reaching its peak, the young man felt a surge of mana within him that quickly began to spread throughout his body. This continued until he started to feel his neurons become interconnected by the ethereal substance.

Slowly a thin line of the stuff took form from the brain crystal and connected to the brain. After a few seconds had passed, the phenomenon began to stop until he couldn't feel anything anymore.

"I made it... a new neural link...," he said. Though, to which power it was related, he didn't know. Though, Erik noticed that his mind had become clearer than ever before. Thoughts came faster, and it became easier to think, and his mind became faster and sharper.

After channeling mana for a bit, Erik discovered his new neural link was related to Conal's power, which allowed him to shapeshift into a beast.

"This is perfect timing." The young man said.

He couldn't test it now since he was at Amber's house, but he planned to do so soon after school by going to his house. Then, Erik got up off the bed and stretched his muscles. His newly-made neural

link also caused his muscle strength to increase. However, he also felt as if the world slowed down, probably due to the increase in dexterity.

<System, tell me the current value of my attribute points,> Erik thought.

[UNDERSTOOD. STRENGTH, DEXTERITY, AND INTELLIGENCE ALL INCREASED BY ONE POINT. STRENGTH IS CURRENTLY AT 19 POINTS, INTELLIGENCE ITS CURRENTLY AT 10 POINTS, WHILE DEXTERITY IS CURRENTLY AT 20 POINTS.]

<Good,> the young man thought. He then returned to bed, knowing that the stat increase would help him during his fight with Nathaniel. Though, as he recalled, he had to fight him the following day, Erik started growing restless.

For sure, this was not going to be an easy fight, and as much as Floyd, Gwen and Amber said, he was going to lose. Though, Erik clearly decided he had to try fighting, even if he lost with certainty. If he didn't, he would feel ashamed for not having tried at all. Since he planned on leaving the country, he had to improve, and this was the right opportunity to do so.

Chapter 112: A phone call

DRIIIIN

Erik was awakened by his smartphone's ringtone. Since he was still connected to the device, the young man didn't even need to pick it up to know who was calling them. Besides, there weren't many people who got his number, so it was easy to guess who the caller was.

"Hello? Uncle Ben?" Erik said on the phone.

"Hey Erik, I hope I didn't wake you up!" Benjamin said.

"Not at all, uncle Ben, not at all!" Erik replied.

"Good then. Look, I heard you joined a competition at school. Why didn't you tell me anything?"

"I'm sorry, uncle Ben, but I had a lot of things to do during these days, and I completely forgot..." Erik said.

"Nevermind then... So, when is your next match scheduled?" The man asked.

"It's scheduled at 11:00 today."

"Mind if I come?" Benjamin asked.

"Of course not! Come to school; behind the main building, there is a ring, and the matches will be held there..."

"All right then, see you later!" Benjamin replied.

"Bye, Uncle Ben!"

The call then ended, but Erik was clearly in a good mood. He hadn't seen Benjamin in a while and was happy he would attend today's match.

Erik then dressed up and quickly went to the living room, where he found Amber already eating. However, this time, Caiden, his son Harry and his wife Luna were at the table.

This was the first time Erik saw the whole family having breakfast together, so he was slightly uncomfortable, especially since Caiden was there. Though, it wasn't like Erik could avoid them.

"Good morning," he sheepishly said to the whole family.

"Hi, Erik!" Amber said while Caiden nodded; her mother smiled, and her little brother cutely waved his little hand. Erik sat on a chair, and immediately a waiter brought him his breakfast.

"So, how are you doing?" Caiden suddenly asked. "Amber told me you went to work yesterday..."

"Oh, fine," Erik answered, "The tournament is going well, and I quite like my job, so it is not particularly stressful going there," Erik said.

"Good for you then, young man," Caiden said with a smile.

"Amber told us you are going to fight Nathaniel McConnel," Luna suddenly interjected.

She was a beautiful but short middle-aged woman with platinum blonde hair, green eyes, and pale skin. She was currently wearing a floral dress that hugged her body tightly, showing off her ample cleavage and leaving her shoulders exposed.

Looking at her, Erik understood where Amber' got her beauty since even her mother was a sight to behold. Her father, Caiden, though, wasn't less attractive than her.

He was a very tall red-haired man with a very muscular body. However, contrary to his wife, he was wearing a black jumpsuit, probably because he would exercise later in the day.

Erik looked at Amber and saw that she, too, was wearing sports attire. It was clear that Amber took a lot from her father too, since the two behaved similarly.

However, it was clear that Caiden wasn't totally himself in front of Erik since he was a little bit cold toward the young man.

However, Erik didn't care, he wasn't going to stay at Amber's house for long, and as soon as the tournament ended, he was going to buy new furniture for his house.

It was a little bit traumatic to leave a place like this, but Erik clearly didn't want to take advantage of Amber or her family. Not that it mattered to them; they were filthy rich, so one more person inside the house was not a problem for them.

Due to the young man and Amber's last night conversation, Erik decided that the best thing to do was to get a little distance from Floyd, Gwen, and Amber. He was grateful for what they did for him until now, but he couldn't accept a friendship based on pity.

It was true that they did a lot for him, but despite everything that happened in his life and his messed up personality, Erik still had a little pride inside of him.

He wasn't going to stop being friends with them overnight but decided to keep a little distance. Who knew, maybe at the Red Palace, he would be able to meet new people.

"Indeed I am, Miss Joyce..." Erik replied.

"You should be worried then. As much as Amber told us, he is the school's stronger fighter..." The woman said.

"Even though he is the strongest, I will still try to win the fight," Erik said. He didn't notice, but Amber's smile widened while Caiden slowly nodded. Despite the first impression he had of the young man, his attitude was positive; and he thought that maybe he had misjudged him.

Luna kept talking to Erik for a bit but left him to eat breakfast. Though, the young man didn't start before accepting his daily quests.

<System, show me the daily quests list,> Erik thought, and as usual, a blue and white screen appeared in front of him.

[Quests List]

{Daily}

<Eating Habits.>

-Rewards for completion: Ten Experience, ten DNA points

-Failure Penalty: None

(Eat a healthy meal)

<Physical training.>

-Rewards for completion: Ten Experience, ten DNA points

-Failure Penalty: None

(Train for at least an hour. The Host may choose whatever exercise to complete the quest.)

<Accept them both!>

As soon as Erik was done, he started eating, and after he finished, the usual notification rang inside his mind.

[DAILY QUEST COMPLETE.]

"We should probably go," Amber said to Erik, and quickly the two left the house and arrived at school with one of the cars.

They waited for Gwen and Floyd at the entrance, and they came soon after. The group glanced again at the electronic board showing today's fights.

THE MATCHES WILL BEGIN AT 11:00

1. Floyd Valdez Versus Anderson Worthington
2. Karl Moran Versus Luisa Zamora
3. Natasha Pope Versus Darragh Montgomery
4. Jacob Humphrey Versus Gwen Lindsay
5. Allan Grimes Versus Stefan Strickland
6. Erik Romano Versus Nathaniel Mc Conel

7. Enya Levy Versus Patricia Elliot

8. Amber Joyce Versus Aaron Greig

Amber and Gwen looked at Erik first and then at Floyd. It was clear that the two were going to drop out of the competition today since they were going to fight against the two people who they believed would fight in the finals.

However, Erik was in a worse situation than his friend since Nathaniel was known to be a ruthless fighter who enjoyed toying with his opponents and loved humiliating them.

No one believed Erik could win; but he had to at least prevent Nathaniel from doing whatever he wanted.

"C'mon Erik, let's go spar a little bit," Amber said, and the four friends immediately left for the gym. After an hour of training, another notification rang inside Erik's mind as he completed his second daily quest.

<Good...> Erik thought.

The spar ended soon after as the contestants had to be well rested in order to fight. However, unbeknownst to the four, three people were looking at them fighting.

"It looks like Erik trained a lot, uh?" Karl said while looking at the young man. He, Natasha, and Nathaniel were spying on Erik and his friends for half an hour.

"He still is trash; nothing changed!" Nathaniel said, "I can beat him easily," he added and smiled widely. Even Natasha and Karl, his friends, couldn't help but feel a slight fear towards the man.

"Though, you have to admit that he was a surprise. What he did to Euan sent shivers down my spine," Natasha said.

"That's why I should teach some manners to the fucker... I think it'd be fun to make him cry." Nathaniel smiled evilly. He then turned to look at Erik as if he was prey.

After saying that, the young man walked towards the exit, followed by Natasha and Karl.

Later, Erik, Amber, Gwen, and Floyd left the gym and went to the main entrance. The fights were going to start soon, so professor Mc Allister was probably going to make a speech they couldn't miss.

Chapter 113: Floyd Versus Anderson (1)

The four friends arrived in front of the podium and waited for professor McAllister to give his speech. As usual, he appeared annoyed and not so eager to talk in front of the students. Like most of the time, he kept his whole speech short, reminded the rules a bit, and then proceeded to say who the matches contestants were again.

After that, all the people moved to the back of the school where the ring had been placed. The first match was going to be Floyd Versus Anderson, so many people were hyped because of the latter.

Though, many knew about the beef running between Floyd and Anderson. The two were best friends in the past, but apparently, Anderson preferred Aaron's and Mikey's company.

The reason why all of that happened was not that clear. However, they were kids when this happened, so it was probably a stupid reason.

Despite all this, it was common knowledge at school that Floyd was still mad at Anderson, and many people expected a great match to occur today.

As the people surrounded the ring, Gwen, Floyd, Amber, and Erik slowly took their place close to it, while Anderson, Aaron, and Mikey did the same but from the other side.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," The referee said. "Today's first match will be fought against Floyd Valdez and Anderson Worthington. Please come up the ring!"

Erik looked at Floyd with a concerned look, "Are you sure you can do this?" he asked.

"Yes. I don't know if I will be able to win, but for sure, I will make Anderson suffer a bit," he said with a grin, to which Erik replied with one of his own.

"Less talk, more action," Gwen said. Floyd entered the ring while giving Gwen dirty looks, though, as he jumped onto the ring and found Anderson in front of him, his annoyance was suddenly redirected to him.

"Floyd!" Anderson said with a displeased look. "How are you?" he asked in a mocking tone.

"Anderson... I'm fine. Don't worry about me; you better start worrying about yourself!" Floyd blatantly declared, to which the crowd reacted with a loud cheer. Anderson gave out another laugh before answering.

"Yeah? We will see..." He turned around and heard the audience cheering even louder than earlier.

"The match is going to start in one minute," the referee said, and a staring contest started between Floyd and Anderson.

3...2...1.. It was then that the referee gave the signal to start, and the bell rang.

The two contestants ran toward each other with a look of pure focus. It was easy to understand for Anderson, but many started to wonder why Floyd had one too.

The young man wasn't really confident about winning since Anderson was stronger than him, and Anderson knew very well how his old friend's power worked. Despite this, fighting against Floyd wasn't going to be easy, even for the favorite contestant.

Anderson raised his arm and aimed at Floyd, trying to punch him in the face. However, Floyd moved his head to the side and avoided the attack easily, but he charged a fist of his own, aiming at Anderson's stomach.

Though the young man obviously understood Floyd's aim so, he grabbed his arm and tried to fly him to the ground. Anderson's move was, however, ineffective since Floyd activated his power, decreasing the momentum and the strength of his opponent's grip. This made Anderson unable to lift Floyd in the air.

That was Floyd's power. He could essentially stop any selected flow of Energy in his surroundings, and the more mana he used and the greater the radius was. However, high leveled attacks required

more mana because their energy was higher than to stop the attack entirely, more mana was required.

The issue was that even though Floyd was practically unbeatable under the right circumstances, the young man could only target a single kind of energy at a time and could only have one target to whom he could block the flow of energy.

Clearly, if he chose the right one, he could kill a person by stopping his or her heartbeat. This would make a perfect power for assassination or defensive maneuvers, but nothing more. Besides, stopping a heart wasn't simple to do at all. Since he couldn't possibly stop Anderson's heart, Floyd's fighting style revolved around his martial arts.

Floyd could stop Anderson from throwing him to the ground by stopping the kinetic movement that his arms were gathering.

However, his opponent, fully knowing how his old friend's power worked, tried to kick him. Floyd raised his leg to protect himself. Still, he got hit with a lot of power by Anderson's mighty kicks.

Erik's friend freed himself from Anderson's grip, not without receiving a lot of kicks from his old friend and being in pain.

"Weren't you going to kick my ass?" Anderson scornfully said. To which his opponent could only reply, frowning.

"SHUT UP BITCH!" Floyd replied. He then entered a fighting position, bringing his fists up and his right leg slightly forward, and then started walking toward Anderson. The man, instead, waited for Floyd to come; he could see countless openings in his opponent's stance, so he wasn't worried.

Floyd then kicked Anderson, who simply parried his attack by raising a leg, and the two kept stalling for time.

Anderson couldn't blindly go in, as Floyd could simply stop the kinetic energy in one of his legs, making him fall to the ground, and then it would be hard to fight.

He could only wait for Floyd and counterattack at the right time so that his opponent didn't have enough time to react.

In the end, Floyd did precisely that; since Anderson wasn't going to attack him, he decided to make another attempt and went directly in front of him.

He was calm, his mind sharp like a razor, and his focus very high. He was trying to find an opening in Anderson's stance, but he couldn't see them.

It was perfect, to say the least, and that enraged Floyd. Not even two years before, the two were on the same level. How did Anderson manage to become so strong despite only two years passing?

Floyd spent countless hours training, years to make neural links and learn to control his power better; despite this, it looked like Anderson was not just one but several steps in front of him, which frustrated him a lot.

His anger grew when he saw his opponent's smug expression, and he began to throw punches at his opponent. Anderson avoided the first punch, parried the second, the third, and so on.

Floyd could do nothing to land a hit on his face, growing restless with each attack. Anderson knew every single way Floyd might try to get past his guard and didn't allow him to do so. It was almost like he could see into the damn future.

Suddenly, Anderson jumped back to avoid Floyd's attack, and while throwing himself back, he raised his leg up to Floyd's head height, kicking him with a quick and agile movement and leaving the spectators speechless. That was not something an average sixteen years old should be able to do.

Floyd was put off-balance by the attack, and he almost fell to the ground. His vision blackened for a second, and the pain in his temple spiked, but he quickly regained his composure.

He had no idea what had happened and how his opponent could attack him from that position; it was almost like Anderson bent his body unnaturally, and that just to hit him in the most unpredictable and lethal way.

Anderson, though, didn't stand still, waiting for Floyd to recover, but instead rushed at him as soon as he regained his balance from the move he had just made.

Chapter 114: Floyd Versus Anderson (2)

As Floyd struggled to stand up, Anderson quickly dashed toward his old friend to deal the finishing blow. However, as he was just a couple of meters away from him, Floyd used his power to erase Anderson's arm's momentum, effectively stopping him from attacking.

The young man felt like there was a wall in front of him that he couldn't breach or surpass. Though, the young man had all his other appendages free, so he attacked with his other arm.

However, Floyd had regained enough senses to avoid the attack, and so he did. Though, at that moment, the power restraining Anderson's arm disappeared, so he was again able to fight against Floyd.

From there, the two contestants mostly parried or evaded punches and kicks. Though, Floyd was having a hard time. If it weren't for his power, he would have been hit by many attacks. Only by decreasing Anderson's motion energy he was able to evade some of the attacks.

Though, since Floyd was still A RHO1 he didn't have many neural links, and his mana expenditure was high. Coupled with the fact that he did not stop just one punch or a kick, he rapidly found himself with low mana reserves.

<Seriously? Is this how I get defeated? Because of mana exhaustion?> Floyd, though.

He then tried to take the initiative by decreasing the energy on Anderson's leg, trying to disrupt his balance, and even landing a couple of hits on him.

Though, the explosion artist was a beast in hand-to-hand combat. As soon as he felt hard moving his legs, he placed them in the most optimal position so that he wouldn't fall down, lose his balance, or be hit.

Obviously, he couldn't do it every time; he was no god, but he managed to do it a good 80% of the time. Much to Floyd's frustration.

"Floyd is going to lose soon," Gwen said. Her battle senses were as sharp as always.

"You are right. I give him ten minutes at best..." Amber added.

"What the hell are you two saying?" Erik interjected, clearly too inexperienced to see how much Floyd was struggling. "They are fighting equally; he still has a chance!"

At that moment, Anderson managed to land a heavy blow on Floyd's face. Leaving Erik dumbstruck. <Shit, I should trust their judgment...> he thought.

The crowd was ecstatic. Anderson's fights were always worthy of being seen. Be it because of his overwhelming strength, be it because of his battle awareness, be it because of his tremendous experience. Anderson was talented. There was nothing to say about it.

That punch destabilized Floyd, he lost sight of his opponent for a moment, and that was all Anderson needed to finally close this match.

He raised his arm again, clutched his hand in a fist, and swung it toward Floyd's face. One time, two times, ten times.

His opponent's face was now swollen and bleeding, yet he continued to resist. But the damage was already too much: Floyd could barely lift his head anymore, let alone dodge Anderson's blows. In less than a minute, he was completely knocked out.

A cheer rose through the arena when Anderson raised his arms triumphantly after knocking down Floyd. The audience loved him!

Erik was stunned. It took some time before he realized what had happened.

Gwen looked at him, "As predicted," she said. "You still have a lot to learn, Erik..." The young man could only nod at that.

"AND THE WINNER IS ANDERSON WORTHINGTON!" the referee said while the healers rushed to heal Floyd. His condition wasn't the best, but he wasn't that wounded.

At that moment, Anderson rushed down the ring and joined Aaron and Mikey in their celebration. Mikey was still upset about his loss against his friend, but he was a realist; he knew he was bound to lose against him.

At the same time, Floyd was brought to the infirmary by the healers, and Amber, Gwen, and Erik followed them to the room.

"How is he?" Gwen asked the healer when they arrived at the infirmary.

"He had some concussions, but we healed him. He should wake up in a couple of hours. His brain needs to recover from the shock."

"Thank you very much," Amber said, shaking the healer's hand with gratefulness.

In the meantime, the next contestants went to the ring to fight. They were Karl Moran and Luisa Zamora. Both were among the top students, with the first being Nathaniel's friend.

Karl was a tall sixteen-year-old with long blonde hair that he wore in a ponytail. He always had a smug smile on his face, and being Nathaniel's friend, he had a horrible view of lower talented people.

He wasn't like Conal, Orson, and Logan, who usually bullied and did beat people. He simply ignored them and, at most, made fun of them; however, he wasn't a good person.

The young man was dressed in combat attire. He had a tight black shirt that covered his pectorals but left his belly exposed and wore black and tight elastic shorts that showed his muscular legs.

Karl was a DRHO2D individual with the power to turn into smoke, making his body unable to be hit with conventional attacks.

Despite being well-known that he had to solidify to attack, it was hard to understand from where he would do so in his gaseous state.

Luisa was instead an average-looking girl with short brown hair, brown eyes, and dark skin. She had an athletic physique which was enhanced by her training.

As a member of the Zamora Clan, Luisa received private tutoring and spent almost every day practicing martial arts.

Although not gifted in any specific area, she had exceptional sharpshooting skills and was a promising soldier.

Her power was pyrokinesis, the signature brain crystal power of his clan, who took small children who awakened this power and made them part of their family.

Unlike Karl, she was more friendly toward others. However, there was still an air of supremacy around her, which probably stemmed from the fact that she belonged to a powerful family.

Although she didn't care much about other people, she respected those that worked hard to achieve something. And unlike Karl, she never laughed at the others.

The young man was obviously nervous before the fight, he didn't know if his power would be enough to win against Luisa, but he couldn't get a bad result and bring shame to Nathaniel, so he steeled his resolve and walked inside the ring. Then the match quickly began.

Luisa looked at Karl with contemplative eyes, then shot a fireball toward him. When the projectile was close enough for him to feel the burning sensation, he turned into smoke, vanishing and filling the entire ring with the substance.

Visibility inside the ring became extremely poor as soon as Karl used his ability. Besides, she knew that the young man could hit her at any moment from any angle.

"What are you going to do now?" Karl exclaimed.

"Shut up and just fight!" Luisa shouted back.

At that moment, Karl's arm materialized behind his opponent's head and hit her.

"HAHAHAHAHAHAH, YOU WILL NEVER GUESS FROM WHERE I'M GOING TO ATTACK!" Karl sounded like a lunatic.

Karl's right arm suddenly vanished completely, leaving empty space between them.

"Motherfucker!" Luisa said.

The young woman knew that to hit her opponent, she had to wait for him to materialize. However, understanding where he was going to attack wasn't easy. The young woman started concentrating and focused all her attention on the mana around her to understand where Karl was. The move worked because, as soon as she felt mana fluctuating wildly, she turned in that direction, and another arm appeared.

Luisa threw another fireball in Karl's direction and the young man barely had the time to turn it into smoke again.

Chapter 115: Natasha Versus Darragh (1)

As the fight between Karl and Luisa continued, Gwen, Erik, and Amber were still in the infirmary, waiting for Floyd to wake up. After twenty minutes of lying on the infirmary bed, the young man slowly regained consciousness.

"Ugh..." Floyd moaned in pain as he tried to stand up.

"Easy, easy," Amber said, pushing Floyd back on the bed.

The young man then looked at his surroundings only to be disoriented by what he did see. He was no longer inside the ring, fighting against Anderson; instead, Gwen, Erik, and Amber surrounded him, and he was in what he assumed was the infirmary.

"Since I'm here, it means I have lost, uh?"

"Yeah..." Erik said. However, he didn't feel that sorry for Floyd. Since learning the reason for them being his friends, to begin with, he started being a little bit resentful.

"You could have done nothing about it, Floyd," Gwen said. "Anderson is simply too strong. Even I would have problems fighting against him despite my armor power," she added.

Floyd sighed deeply. His defeat had not been due to any lack of skill or strength; rather, it seemed that there was just something about Anderson that made even the best fighters fall short when facing him. A cheer erupted from a distance; it was due to the people watching the fight between Karl and Luisa.

"Who is fighting right now?" Floyd asked.

"Karl and Luisa," Amber replied. "It wasn't long since you did pass out."

"I get it..." Floyd replied.

Another cheer rang from a distance.

"Who do you think is going to win the match?" Erik asked Gwen who was the most knowledgeable person among the four.

"To be honest, I don't really know," the woman replied. "Karl and Luisa are equally matched and have very nasty powers. Though, if I really had to take the side of one of the two, I would say that Luisa has greater odds of winning," Gwen said.

"Is this because she has a pyrokinesis power?" Erik asked.

"Indeed, since they both are DRHO1, the only difference between them is because of the Jorm scale, which is D for Karl, while B for Luisa. Though her opponent is a very cunning one, and he can find a way to beat her regardless," Gwen concluded.

"I get it," Erik said.

In the meantime, the fight between Karl and Luisa was getting heated. The young man was constantly in his smoke form and attacked Luisa from different angles.

The young woman couldn't possibly avoid them all, but she did her best and at least evaded the most devastating attacks.

At the same time, she reacted quickly to Karl's attack, sending him fireballs that burned his skin quite often, leaving the young man in pain and giving him a hard time.

But after some time, Karl stopped attacking directly at the young woman. Instead, he began throwing various rocks he got from the ground around the ring toward Luisa with such speed and accuracy that it almost appeared as though those projectiles were shot by a gun.

One moment, the young man was throwing stones from her left, the other moment from her blind side, making it so that the young woman had problems attacking him with her fireballs since he could simply turn into smoke before she could hit him.

"You won't be able to stay formless forever, Karl!" Luisa shouted. It was indeed true, the fight was already going on for twenty minutes, and Karl was having problems sustaining his power. For this reason, the young man decided to gamble.

He quickly materialized behind Luisa, who, feeling his presence, turned behind, shooting a fireball at point blank. However, Karl only partially turned to smoke, making the fireball pass through him just in the nick of time while punching her with all his strength with his other arm that were still in human shape.

POW

Luisa's eyesight turned black for a moment, and that was all Karl needed. He threw another punch, and then another, until Luisa fell to the ground, unable to resist his attacks. Once she was on the ground, Karl tried to go on top of her and beat her up once and for all.

Still, Luisa fired another fireball at point-blank range, almost hitting Karl but actually setting part of his blond hair on fire.

However, he reacted quickly. He vanished into smoke, reappeared over Luisa's head, and stomped on her with all his strength, making her fall unconscious.

Cheers erupted, and quickly, the referee declared Karl as the winner.

"THE WINNER IS KARL MORAN!"

Cheers reverberated across the field, reaching the school's innards. Soon enough, the healers moved inside the ring to check on Luisa. At that moment, Gwen, Floyd, Amber, and Erik reached the ring; they saw Karl triumphantly raising his hands and an unconscious Luisa on the ground.

"That prick managed to win, and I didn't?" Floyd shouted in outrage.

"Calm down, Floyd..." Gwen said, "You fought against Anderson..." That wasn't enough to calm the young man down, and he angrily kicked the ground.

There was only one fight before Gwen's turn to fight, Natasha versus Darragh. The woman was another one of Nathaniel's lackeys who followed him everywhere. Many people speculated that the two had some kind of relationship since Natasha showed some weird behavior around him.

Natasha could only be described as a beautiful woman with long black shoulder-length hair who used her bangs to cover her forehead. She had an hourglass body shape, but despite this, she was well-toned, as her shoulders were wide and muscular and she was tanned.

Everything about the woman oozed the femme-fatale aura, and she even dressed quite boldly. She usually wore black leggings and shirts that hugged her body tightly, exposing her shoulders and back.

Her shirt would sometimes show off her cleavage or the tops of her breasts if she bent forward too much. She was a BRHO1D individual with the power to create a mana whip. However, she had a sub-power that allowed her to inject the weapon with poisonous mana.

Darragh was, instead, a handsome man with dark brown eyes and short brown hair. His face looked like a model's, except for a scar running vertically along his cheek.

On his upper torso was a tattoo depicting something resembling an eye; the tattoo was characteristic of the Montgomery family.

As Adam's and Luisa's clan, the Montgomery family dealt with elemental users, who could, in this case, control the earth and stones around them.

It was another big clan that usually took children with earth elemental brain crystal powers since they were very young.

The Family held considerable power inside the nation since elemental brain crystal powers were usually mighty, B-rated on the Jorm scale. Darragh was an excellent fighter and was known as a strong earth user inside the school.

"AND NOW!" the referee said, "THE FOLLOWING MATCH WILL BE FOUGHT BETWEEN DARRAGH MONTGOMERY AND NATASHA POPE! LET THEM FEEL YOUR PRESENCE, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN!"

As soon as their names were called, both Darragh and Natasha jumped on the ring. The two stared at each other without saying anything. There was no need to speak since both knew what to do, fight.

"THE MATCH IS GOING TO START IN A MINUTE, PLEASE, CONTESTANTS, READY YOURSELF!" the referee said, and both the fighters started channeling mana. Natasha summoned her poisonous whip while Darragh spread his mana on the surrounding ground to shoot stone projectiles.

"3...2...1... FIGHT!"

Chapter 116: Natasha Versus Darragh (2)

As soon as the referee gave the signal to start, Darragh dashed toward Natasha. There was a difference between their powers.

While the handsome boy could only throw two to three earth projectiles at a time, Natasha's weapon could be used indefinitely, meaning that she could attack her opponent more often than he could.

At the same time, though, this meant that her power consumed much more power than Darragh's. In the end, the fight's result depended on who could take better advantage of their own power.

Since Darragh couldn't use it as often as Natasha, their fighting style was very different. The young man essentially fought with martial arts.

He used his power only to gain advantages or to hit his opponent where and when they least expected. In the future, things would be different, but since Darragh was still at the RHO level, there wasn't much he could do.

On the contrary, Natasha's fighting style heavily relied on her mana weapon. She was, of course, a very proficient melee fighter. Still, she decided that the best thing to do during her training time was to learn how to properly use her whip instead of solely focusing on martial arts.

Natasha snapped her whip several times at her opponent, but with agile moves, the young man avoided them all and quickly covered the distance between him and her in a matter of moments.

However, the young woman wasn't stupid and didn't stay idle. She retreated for several meters, using her whip to at least slow Darragh down.

Once the young man was too close, she moved her whip horizontally, creating a sort of tornado around her.

The weapon she was wielding released a toxic fume which quickly surrounded her and prevented Darragh from getting in striking range.

The young man knew the woman's power well and was aware that if he let her poison spread inside his body, the match would end quickly.

To try and stop the woman's defensive move, Darragh unleashed one of the two projectiles they shot from the ground surrounding the ring and quickly traveled toward her. To stop the projectile, Natasha had to use her whip. With a flick of her wrist, the weapon lashed at the earth projectile with a sinuous movement. It did look like a snake had just attacked its prey.

The impact between the whip and the projectile broke the second into tiny pieces. Natasha showed incredible proficiency with the weapon since hitting a flying object with it was akin to impossible for sixteen years old at low levels.

However, the move left Darragh free to strike again, so he launched another rock at the young woman while running again toward her.

The projectile was hurled at the young woman with impressive speed and accuracy. He threw it straight ahead, hoping to catch Natasha off guard while she tried to recover from her previous defense.

This time, however, it missed entirely because the young woman dodged to the side. As a result, the stone struck the ground right next to her foot, causing small rocks to rain upon her, but that didn't damage her.

Darragh tried to launch yet another projectile, but Natasha was ready. Using her whip, she stopped the missile before it even got near her.

Her skill with the whip was such that it seemed like she'd been practicing it forever. A few seconds later, though, Darragh was in front of the young woman, and a bout between the two fighters began.

"Natasha is in serious trouble now," Gwen said. Amber, Floyd, Erik, and many of the people around her turned to look at her.

It was a well-established fact that the young woman was an expert. Not that the ones looking at the fight weren't. After all, they had been part of the militaries at one point in their lives. However, the young woman showed keen insight and was rarely wrong in her assessments.

"She should have known that she couldn't rely on her whip alone against someone as good as Darragh."

Floyd nodded. Even if Natasha was skilled enough to block every single projectile thrown by Darragh, it would have been hard for her to fight on equal terms against the boy since he was better than her at fighting melee.

If she wanted to win, then she would need to find a way to get distance from the boy, and even that wouldn't be a simple fight since the young man had powerful distance attacks.

However, everything would be different if she managed to land a hit on her opponent with the whip since the potent poison would profoundly affect him.

Gwen's analysis was spot on. From that point onward, Natasha's fight became incomparably hard; she had trouble gaining distance from the man and had difficulty reacting to his attacks.

That actually forced the young woman to shorten her whip, and as she did that, the fight started balancing out.

"I did not expect that," Floyd said.

"Indeed, that has been a good choice," Amber commented, referring to Natasha's choice to shorten the whip. "She was able to bring balance between them again."

At that moment, Natasha landed her first hit on Darragh. This basically spelled the young man's defeat. Since the poison started acting out, the young man became more fatigued; not only that, but he also felt a lot of pain from the wound.

That meant two things. The first was that Darragh couldn't move as before and had to start avoiding melee combat, losing the advantage he had for most of the fight. The second was that due to the pain, even his aim worsened.

"That's it, she did it, " Floyd said, obviously referring to the successful hit the young woman could land. Erik immediately understood what his friend meant.

After their friends explained to him how Natasha's poison worked, he could see its effect on Darragh. He was slow, in visible pain, and extremely fatigued. He was going to lose the fight.

In the end, it didn't take much time for the young woman to win against the child of the Montgomery family. She was quickly declared the winner since Darragh decided to surrender since he didn't have the strength anymore to fight.

"THE WINNER IS NATASHA POPE!" the referee said.

There was no shame in this loss. The young man knew that Natasha was a strong fighter, and despite this, the fight had been pretty balanced most of the time. The young man did a pretty good job and got out of the ring with a proud look.

"Your time has come, Gwen," Erik said.

"Yeah..." The woman replied.

"Are you worried?" Amber asked. It was clear she was worried about her best friend. Her opponent was going to be Jacob Humphrey, with his cloning ability.

It was true that Gwen could create an armor out of mana, but it was still possible for her to be subdued thanks to grappling moves.

Besides, not knowing who her real opponent was among his clones was in itself a problem. She could waste a lot of time on the wrong opponent only to find the real one still in top shape.

The fight was not going to be simple; if the young woman wanted to win, she had to play it smart.

"Not really... I think I found out how to discern who the original is..." she answered.

The group looked at each other. They knew exactly that; if Gwen wasn't worried, they had nothing to fear. Of course, there was always a chance he might surprise her, meaning that she still had to be careful.

Chapter 117: Gwen Versus Jacob (1)

After the healers did their job on Darragh and he and Natasha went out of the ring, the announcer started presenting the next fighters.

"FOR THE NEXT FIGHT, WE ARE GOING TO SEE GWEN LINDSAY AND JACOB HUMPHREY. LET THEM FEEL YOUR PRESENCE!" the referee said.

"Good luck Gwen," Erik said.

"Yeah, good luck!" Floyd added.

Gwen nodded and then walked toward the ring with light steps. She appeared calm on the surface, but internally her mind was on hyperdrive. She recalled every time she saw Jacob fight, his moves, his power, his fighting style. Everything she deemed remotely useful to win, even his personality.

At the same time, Jacob entered the ring. The young man had a Mohican and had a lot of piercings. Erik knew that he usually dressed in jeans and metal band t-shirts, but he was in sports attire today.

He seemed to be wearing black shorts, which very well showed off his muscular legs. He had a tight shirt that hugged him nicely around the chest area and revealed some impressive pectorals as they clung tightly to it.

It was an outfit for showing off one's muscles rather than concealing any flaws or weaknesses. The young man already had several tattoos covering most parts of his arms from shoulders down. His body looked like a chiseled marble sculpture, with no visible scars on this carved physique.

His peculiar look attracted many of the people watching the fight. Some didn't like him since he appeared like a street punk, but girls mostly did.

However, when Gwen entered the ring, who didn't know her were left stunned. The woman was massive, not only because she was hella tall, she stood at an impressive height for a lady, about 1.8 meters tall, but also because of her massive body.

Gwen had a body type that many guys would covet since she was ripped and had a lot of muscle. The young woman wasn't a brute; she had beautiful brown hair that reached well beyond her shoulders and a pretty face. She was not as stunning as Amber, but she wasn't ugly by any means.

She was currently wearing a compression shirt and a pair of boxing shorts, which fell rather large on her body. The woman probably wanted to stay as comfortable as possible and didn't want her clothes getting in the way. Though, wearing tight pants wasn't her style. She didn't like showing off and revealing too much skin. Her boxer shorts weren't particularly sexy, just functional.

Most of the people already knew their powers, but those who did not know them decided to ask their friends and family. They quickly explained that despite Jacob being a great fighter, Gwen was among the strongest. They also told them who their friends were, and Erik's name came up here and there. Of course, most of the people concentrated on Amber's name.

The referee started quickly, counting the seconds before the fight started. Gwen immediately conjured a full armor on her body, hiding what little she was showing. Jacob instead conjured two clones, and the fight quickly became a 3v1.

Whoever saw Jacob's previous fights knew how hard it was to contend against him and his clones. However, Gwen's armor would give her an edge since she didn't have to avoid or parry all of his attacks.

"3...2...1...FIGHT!"

Jacob immediately started attacking, while Gwen remained composed where she stood. It was clear to the boy that the only thing he could do to win against the young woman's armor was to win by submission.

So, the first thing the young man tried to do was trying to circle around the young woman to stop her from running away. Though, she knew that would be the worst thing to happen, so she started moving around the ring without giving her opponent and his clones any opportunity to do so.

While doing that, Gwen kept throwing punches and kicks toward Jacob, who dodged each attack. This would be a fight in which if the young woman allowed Jacob to grab her just once, she would be on the losing side.

It soon turned into a battle between evasions and counterattacks, but neither of those methods worked well for either side. Every time Gwen moved, her opponents' clones tried to grab her, forcing her to shake them off. As expected, it wasn't going to be an easy fight.

One of Jacob's clones almost caught her, but she immediately grabbed him and launched him in the air. At the same time, the original and the other one tried to grab her by the waist.

However, Gwen used her position to kick the one on her left in the face. She managed to do so, and the remaining Jacob, who she wasn't sure was the original or a clone, could not grab her.

She escaped her opponent's grasp with a quick and agile movement and quickly dashed toward the clones still standing. Gwen started attacking Jacob, while the latter could do nothing but try to grab her since he would only injure himself if he used his punches.

Gwen managed to land five hits on the clone's face, sending him to the ground in pain with the last one. Her gauntlets packed quite a punch.

At the same time, the other two tried to grab her again. One of the two was actually able to do so by blocking her by the waist. Still, Gwen quickly punched with both her hands on the clone's head, making him fall unconscious.

The clone vanished in a wisp of smoke, and only two remained. One that was still trying to stand up, and the other that, instead, kicked her right leg and made her fall to the ground.

Once the other clone stood up, immediately beside him, another clone appeared.

<ITS HIM!> Gwen shouted internally; she found out who the original was. The young woman understood the trick behind Jacob's cloning brain crystal power. Essentially, every time he created the clone, he would vanish in smoke giving the illusion that the one who spawned was the clone, while, in truth, it was him.

Despite finding out who the original was, Gwen was still on the floor with the other clone on her.

The young woman used both legs to throw the clone in the air and free herself. However, the original and the other duplicate quickly rushed toward her, and Gwen had to find a way to stand up quickly.

She rotated herself by spreading her legs, like she was doing a windmill, and then stood on her legs. The two opponents, though, reached her.

She punched the clone while Jacob tried to restrain her. She quickly freed herself by hitting the original's face with the back of her head, and blood started gushing out of his nose.

The clone she previously threw to the ground quickly arrived at her, and she was forced to focus on him. She punched him many times, and since the damage her gauntlets did was much greater than her bare fists, she could knock him out too.

"She is having a hard time," Erik said.

"Yeah, Jacob is better than anticipated," Floyd said.

"We must have faith in her. She said she would win, and this is exactly what will happen!" Amber said. She had unshakable faith in her friends, and she trusted her words.

"Yeah, but fighting against three opponents with her power is not simple, Amber," Floyd said.

"I have to agree with him, I can't see how she can keep up with this rhythm for long," Erik added.

Amber turned to look at the fight, almost enraged by her friends' words.

For both contestants, keeping up with their mana expenditure was not easy. Gwen had to keep her full body armor on at all times, while Jacob had to maintain his clones.

However, creating new ones also expended mana, and since the young man had to create two new clones during the fight, he was slightly disadvantaged.

Besides this, he was currently prevailing over his opponent since fighting against three people was not easy for Gwen.

The young woman severely underestimated Jacob. She thought she would easily win against him, but his endurance and ability to tank hits were higher than expected.

Clearly, she was also lucky because Jacob couldn't use his martial arts. He couldn't punch or kick her without facing some damage since her armor was strong, which helped her a lot.

Chapter 118: Gwen Versus Jacob (2)

Gwen was now facing a clone and the original. However, she had her eyes set on the second one. Jacob immediately understood that his opponent had figured out who he was, but he couldn't understand how.

He never told his power weakness to anybody else. Not even his mother and father knew it, yet the woman in front of him had her eyes set on him.

<SHIT...>

Gwen started charging at Jacob like a bull elephant, with her armor giving her a terrifying look. The armor had a pair of short horns jutting out of the helm.

They were totally constructed of mana that had been solidified. Yet, they had such a natural appearance that it seemed as though they had been taken off by a thaid and planted on top of it.

A T-shaped slit allowed the young woman to see, and that was basically the only part of her body that could be seen. The gauntlets, the pauldrons, the cuirass, and the greaves covered the rest.

She didn't only look like a bull elephant but like a tank. And yet Jacob was facing her as if he had been fighting against anybody else.

Jacob tried to use her body weight to throw her into the air, though Gwen was too smart and experienced to fall for such a trick. As soon as she was close enough, she raised her leg and kicked Jacob hard in the guts making him fall to the ground.

"YEAH! THAT'S HOW YOU DO IT!" Floyd shouted. Gwen glanced at her friend while the clone quickly arrived behind her, grabbing her by the waist and throwing her in the air. That was a calculated move as he immediately used a suplex maneuver, slamming her down onto the floor.

The young woman violently hit the ground, but fortunately, her helm protected her head. The woman quickly tried to stand up, with the clone still clung to her back. However, Gwen was a very strong girl, so she was able to stand up while lifting the clone up.

Though she couldn't shake him off, so she jumped. Landing with all of her and her armor's weight over the clone and then using her head and arms to beat him unconscious. She was able to pull that off, but while she did, Jacob stood up from the ground and charged at her again. He was finally able to catch her in the end.

Jacob grabbed her by the neck, tried to choke her, and almost made it.

"GWEN!" Amber shouted from the sidelines. Visibly worried about her friend's well-being.

"C'mon, Gwen, you can do it!" Floyd shouted, while Erik simply remained silent and watched the match.

Gwen had serious trouble breathing, and she was slowly losing her breath while trying to get rid of her opponent.

She yanked, pulled, and pushed herself away from Jacob until she got free. Unfortunately, when she freed herself, she fell to the floor due to a loss of balance caused by a lack of oxygen.

But this time, Jacob lifted his foot and stomped on the side of her helmet. Gwen didn't suffer much from the blow. She rolled on the ground and consequently stood up.

Gwen felt her opponent start channeling mana. That was it; she would lose if she allowed the young man to create his clones again.

This was opposite to what she predicted before the fight, as Jacob proved himself to be quite strong, much stronger than she initially assumed. She charged at the young man with all her strength and speared him.

The crowd cheered loudly while looking at that move. They saw her body bending in position and her right shoulder hitting the man's abdomen like a train. It was an amazing sight.

The woman fell on him with all her and the armor's weight; the momentum she gained increased the damage several times.

The blow she unleashed on the poor man was so strong it made Jacob lose his breath. For a couple of seconds, he couldn't breathe, and that was all Gwen needed.

She started punching him hard in the face with her gauntlets on until his face was bloodied. But Gwen didn't stop there. She continued attacking her foe, punching him repeatedly in the abdomen and other parts. He lost consciousness soon after, and she was declared the fight's winner.

"THE WINNER IS GWEN LINDSAY!" the referee shouted. The people spectating the fight went into raptures. It seemed that most people wanted the young woman to win.

When the crowd settled down, Gwen saw her friends standing next to each other. Amber looked happy and proud, whereas Floyd and Erik nodded at her in approval. She won in the end.

"What did I say? She won!" Amber said, jumping all over the place.

It was at that moment that Gwen went out of the ring. She was sweaty and tired but also very satisfied. The match had been really intense she almost lost after all.

Instead, she walked towards her friends with her head held high and a smile on her lips. When she reached Amber, they hugged tightly, which made her feel even more relieved.

"Congratulations, Gwen!" Amber said, clearly happy for her friend. Erik simply patted her on the shoulder while Floyd teased her a little bit.

"You took your time, uh?" Floyd said with a smug face.

"Shut up, you idiot..." Gwen replied.

Only a fight remained before Erik was going to fight against Nathaniel. Allan's and Stefan's one. Many people knew who the two contestants were. However, Allan was the underdog in the competition, so he had not the same number of supporters Stefan had.

"LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, BEFORE THE NEXT MATCH, THERE WILL BE AN HOUR BREAK," the referee said.

"Are we going to look at the match?" Erik asked.

"Yes, let's stay..." Gwen said. Amber looked at her with a slight smile. The truth was that when Floyd teased her about Allan, he wasn't wrong.

The young woman had a crush on him, but only Amber knew. Floyd joked about it once, but he was only speculating. Gwen didn't want to imagine how he would bring her to exhaustion if he learned about it.

As for Erik, Gwen knew he wouldn't have made fun of her, but she didn't know him so well. After all, they started being friends only recently, so she didn't feel comfortable telling him.

"Ok, but let's go take something fresh to drink. I'm very thirsty," Erik said.

"Yeah, it's not a bad idea!" Floyd replied.

The four then went to the cafeteria, which was still open despite the school being already ended. The place worked as a restaurant for the people that wanted to eat before the next matches. After all, it was already lunchtime, so people flooded the place.

Gwen was thirsty and hungry and decided to order food, Floyd did the same since he had already fought, but since Erik and Amber were going to fight later, they decided to only drink water.

"So..." Erik said, "What do I do with Nathaniel?" he asked.

The three turned to look at him, and each one gave their advice to the young man. Though, there wasn't much to really say. Winning this match was akin to impossible for Erik; Nathaniel's power was stronger than his, and his martial arts better.

Erik was forced to fight melee against him due to his sharpening power. Still, since Nathaniel was well-versed in martial arts, and his power allowed him to land attacks despite not directly hitting him with his fists, Erik was bound to lose that match.

However, Erik didn't want to fight with an already losing mentality, so he tried to find a solution to his current predicament, but unfortunately, he found none. So, he simply decided to fight, hoping things would turn out for the better. Not the best thing to do, but the only one he had available.

The four teenagers' food and drinks arrived shortly after, and at least for that small moment, Erik could forget that he was going to fight the strongest student in the whole school.

Chapter 119: Allan Versus Stefan

The four friends then left the cafeteria as it was almost time for the fights to resume. The next match was going to be fought between Allan and Stefan. Only the second was a top student, but Allan showed remarkable fighting prowess and reached this point. He was going to join the Red Palace.

Allan was delighted with his results. Becoming part of the vast organization that the Red Palace represented would undoubtedly give him many growth opportunities. It was wishful thinking, but the young man hoped to get into the first three positions so that he could choose his teacher. He already knew who he wanted to train with, the famous Martin Coven.

He was a powerful user, very high inside the Red Palace ranking, and with a brain crystal power that allowed him to conjure a spear, exactly like Allan.

He was not only strong but also a demon with such a weapon in his hands. The young man believed that he would become an unstoppable fighter under his guidance, and he was hell-bent on being trained by him. That, of course, if he managed to reach at least third place.

As Erik, Gwen, Floyd, and Amber reached the ring, so did the other people. Compared to the previous fights, there were much more people than usual. The reason was that Allan was not a top student, so the others who were not part of this small elite all came to cheer the young man.

They wanted the young man to win because that would be, in a sense, like they themselves could surpass the wall that the top students represented. There was a lot of anticipation for this match.

"What do you think is going to happen?" Erik asked Gwen. However, contrary to the other times, the young woman couldn't predict the match outcome.

It wasn't that she didn't know the strength disparity between the two, but that she did hope that Allan would win. The truth was that, in her opinion, her young crush would probably lose since Stefan had a phasing ability and was immune to physical attacks.

He wasn't immune to energy-based attacks, so this meant that there was a possibility that Allan's attack would work against him, but no one really knew since the two never fought.

"I don't know..." Gwen replied.

"What? Really?" Erik said.

"Really..."

Amber observed the look in her friend's eyes; she was worried about Allan's well-being. Stefan wasn't an easy fight. In fact, he was one of the most challenging opponents out of those joining the tournament.

Amber grabbed Gwen's hand and tightened the grip, hoping Gwen would calm down a little bit. Amber leaned to Gwen's ear, whispered, "Let's just cross fingers..." and smiled widely.

Gwen replied in the same way, and a little bit of her uneasiness subsided. However, that wasn't nearly enough to calm her down completely.

Erik actually saw the two women's interaction and was left a little bit puzzled. However, he didn't say anything. He didn't know what the two told each other; it was none of his business.

Allan and Stefan walked toward the ring and waited for the referee to call their names. It didn't take much for him to do so.

"THESE MATCH OPPONENTS WILL BE ALLAN GRIMES AND STEFAN STRICKLAND. SHOW THEM YOUR SUPPORT!" the referee said to the microphone.

The people waiting for the fight to match started cheering loudly, while the ones who were still far from the ring rushed there to see the match. This caused quite a commotion around.

A few seconds later, both fighters stepped into the ring. They faced each other, and after a moment of silence, Stefan started trash-talking Allan.

"Don't think that just because you made it this far, you are one of us..." He said. The young man was clearly proud of being a top student. He was angry that he would join the Red Palace, while Adam, his best friend, didn't.

Even if Stefan couldn't make his friend join the Red Palace, at least he could make the one who took his place pay. Actually, Floyd eliminated Adam, but his friend was angry at Allan for some weird reason.

"I don't need to be part of your small group!" Allan replied, only angering Stefan more.

"3...2...1...FIGHT!" the referee shouted.

At that moment, Allan materialized his electric spear, and with it in his hands, he dashed toward his opponent.

Allan ran straight through the middle of the arena. Still, before he could hit Stefan, the latter activated his brain crystal power, becoming ethereal.

Allan hit the empty air but immediately channeled electricity through his weapon. Stefan sensed this move's danger and immediately ran back to avoid the attack.

The spear started being surrounded by sparks of electricity. They looked like snakes dancing around the weapon as they moved.

Stefan was still ethereal, but judging from his reaction, the electricity could actually hurt him. Gwen grinned. It looked like Allan really did have an opportunity against his opponent.

"If you think that will be enough to win, you are gravely mistaken," Stefan said as he avoided another attack. His voice sounded imposing, almost demonic.

From there, the fight began. Allan used his spear to attack Stefan, but the latter avoided every move and used his phasing power to tank all those attacks he could take advantage of to hit his opponent, obviously, if they weren't electrified.

Actually, Stefan's power significantly boosted the young man's speed. Since nothing created resistance on his body, he also phased below the ground and reappeared behind Allan. Often managing to land hits on him or make him fall to the ground.

Despite the great start, the fight quickly turned in Stefan's favor.

As Gwen watched the fight, her worry increased, as Allan would probably lose. She hoped the young man could at least make it past this round, but in the end, Stefan represented a wall too high for him to surpass.

Allan swung his spear countless times, but Stefan avoided each attack. The only time the spear user could injure his opponent was when the latter materialized to attack him.

The young man managed to create a wound on his opponent's chest. However, that wasn't enough; Stefan kept fighting as if nothing had happened, and Allan quickly accumulated wound after wound.

After twenty more minutes, the young man received a heavy blow on the head and fell to the ground. Stefan then sat on top of Allan and started ferociously beating him. The young man quickly lost control over his neural links, the mana inside his body stopped circulating, and the electric spear disappeared. Soon after, he lost consciousness, and the healers rushed inside the ring to fix the young man.

"THE WINNER IS STEFAN STRICKLAND!" the referee shouted.

Amber turned to look at Gwen, who had a dejected look on her face. Stefan quickly jumped off the ring and went to Adam, who was spectating the fight. He gave a high-five to the young student and then went away from the ring.

Since he didn't have other fights to make, he decided to go take a shower. Despite having won, the fight had not been so simple. Allan showed great prowess and forced the young man to fight seriously, lest losing the fight and ridicule himself.

Amber couldn't say much to Gwen since the latter didn't want Erik and Floyd to find out she liked Allan. Erik did notice something, but Floyd was totally unaware of this. However, Gwen, Floyd, and Amber quickly turned to look at their friend. It was his turn to fight, and he would meet Nathaniel in the ring.

"Erik, are you ready?" Amber asked.

"I would be lying if I said I am.... the young man replied.

"Remember, Erik, your goal is not to win but to avoid being humiliated!" Floyd said.

"All right..."

Chapter 120: Erik Versus Nathaniel (1)

After thinking about the incoming match for a long time, Erik stopped being delusional about his win. He clearly accepted that victory against Nathaniel was impossible at his current strength. That if he couldn't use all his powers.

However, the fact that his friends didn't have a shred of confidence in him greatly upset the young man. That made Erik think, was it better to have friends that tried to cheer him up and believed in him regardless of the situation or friends who told him the truth regardless of how bad it was?

The young man was still too much socially inexperienced to understand or simply decide what he liked more. However, he was slightly disappointed by Amber, Floyd, and Gwen.

"Erik, do remember this, Nathaniel has the weird habit of toying with his opponents," said Floyd as they sat together in front of the ring. "He's always doing something unnecessarily violent and only cares about winning. Be careful out there because he will probably try to make you suffer!"

"Yes, don't worry..." Erik replied.

"LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THE NEXT MATCH IS GOING TO START SOON. THIS FIGHT CONTESTANTS WILL BE ERIK ROMANO AND NATHANIEL MC CONEL! A ROUND OF APPLAUSE FOR THE TWO FIGHTERS!" the referee said.

Erik walked toward the ring with heavy steps. He was really nervous and anxious. His mind tried to race over every possible scenario this fight could take.

What would happen once he was face to face with Nathaniel? Would he even be able to resist ten minutes? Could he even land a hit on him?

Erik had already decided not to quit and actually give his all during this match, but he had to admit that all his friends said about the young man scared him a little bit.

But the problem was if he didn't try now, that would already be a loss. If he really planned to escape the nation, sooner or later, he needed to steel his resolve. He needed to be strong enough to pull this off.

He had to start facing opponents he wasn't confident about winning against. After all, once outside of the city, it was the law of the jungle, and every fight he was going to partake in would be a fight to the death against thaid's.

"Good luck, Erik," Amber said to her friend from the side of the ring. "Remember what I taught you during our sparrings: keep your guard up and move forward," she added.

Gwen nodded encouragingly while Floyd gave Erik an enthusiastic smile.

Erik nodded, trying hard to keep his composure. As soon as he stepped into the ring, the first thing he did was look around to see where Nathaniel was standing. The young man arrived in the middle of the ring shortly after.

"AS USUAL, BOYS, NO LETHAL MOVES, OR YOU WILL BE DISQUALIFIED!" The referee eyed both Nathaniel and Erik since they were the ones that used the most dangerous moves out of all the tournament participants.

"Your mom will not be able to recognize you once I am done with you... OH SORRY! YOU DON'T HAVE A MOTHER!" Nathaniel mockingly said.

Erik's rage surged inside him, but he tried to fight it with all his strength since he knew that an unstable state of mind was much more dangerous than a strong opponent.

<Analysis,> Erik said in his mind, and the usual screen appeared in front of him.

- Name: Nathaniel Mc Conel.

- Brain crystal power: Force manipulation (UNIQUE)

-Race: Human.

-Physical characteristics: Approximately 1.70 centimeters tall. Very muscular. Estimated weight 95 kilograms.

-Personality and traits: Nathaniel Mc Conel is a very prideful individual with violent tendencies. According to the rumors, he beat up many opponents during past matches and isn't a stranger to bullying. Floyd describes him as a very violent individual who likes to toy with his opponents and make them suffer. Many people highly evaluated his power, and his teachers declared him a battle genius.

-Power Level: 88

-Approximate Strength: 23

-Approximate Intelligence: 12

-Approximate Dexterity: 19

-Approximate Energy: 672

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<WHAT THE HELL?> Erik thought. On his face was plastered a look of incredulity. He was already aware that Nathaniel had a B-ranked brain crystal on the Ferebitz scale.

Still, since he never fought against people on this level, since they were also very rare, he didn't actually know the range of energy such people possessed.

Nathaniel had 680 energy points. That was the highest amount of energy Erik had ever seen, and the system estimated his level to be around power level 88.

The highest leveled creature he ever faced was the Leylarhad, which was at power level 58, but Nathaniel was 30 power levels higher.

Now, Erik was aware of how the system estimated a creature's level. It used a complicated formula that was based on the amount of Energy, Strength, Dexterity, and Intelligence the creature possessed.

It was clear that the higher the amount of energy and clearly of mana the individual had and the higher his or her level was, but physical stats also played an important role.

Mana was not everything. From Nathaniel's stats, it was clear that he wasn't superhuman and still was an RHO3-ranked individual on the Idor scale. Yet, his strength was on par with the Leylarhad cub and the Criculs.

Erik's strength and dexterity were still manageable since Nathaniel wasn't much stronger than him. Besides, the awakener actually had a point more than Nathaniel in dexterity. Still, he lacked four points in strength, meaning that his opponent was stronger and faster than him.

Yet, his absurd amount of mana was the real problem, and it meant two things: first, Nathaniel could use his power for a long amount of time, and second his power was bound to be very strong in terms of destructive power.

Being low ranked on the Idor scale meant that the mana expenditures were still relatively high. Still, with all that mana, Nathaniel could already fight for long periods. He was actually able to fight against high-ranked individuals with ease.

Erik's opponent observed the look of pure horror in his eyes and made an evil grin. Then, the referee went to the middle of the ring, standing in front of the two opponents. He started counting down from sixty. The fight was going to begin in a minute.

"3...2...1... FIGHT!" the referee said, and then the bell rang.

Nathaniel immediately dashed at Erik while the young man channeled mana throughout his body. Erik knew that if he sharpened his arms, at least he would prevent Nathaniel from attacking melee. However, that wouldn't stop his power. But at least it was better than nothing.

As soon as Nathaniel was in front of Erik, he unleashed a barrage of punches that Erik evaded with difficulty.

The young man kept dodging the attacks until he reached one side of the ring. Nathaniel managed to push him with his back on a wall in not even a minute!

The force user punched hard, but Erik parried with his arms this time. Nathaniel could stop his momentum before his fist clashed with Erik's mana, avoiding a bad injury. It did look like Erik wasn't as inept at fighting as he did believe.

However, Nathaniel knew that wasn't enough to stop him. He retreated several steps and started channeling mana. Erik could sense the sheer amount the young man was able to control and was horrified. Soon after, Nathaniel's fists were surrounded by energy. While looking at his opponent, he suddenly said, "You are done for plant hugger!"