

## BIOLOGICAL 131

### Chapter 131: The tests (2)

As Nathaniel quickly left the stage, Anderson approached the burly man.

"I'm ready, sir!" Anderson said. The man clearly liked Anderson's attitude since he showed great respect. "Let's start then!" the burly man said, and the young man started immediately attacking.

Anderson started with a series of punches that the burly man effortlessly avoided. However, Anderson's skills immediately surfaced. His punches were executed perfectly, almost too well for a sixteen-year-old.

His kicks were deadly, and all aimed at one or two openings the old men left to test the young one. However, the guy was a little bit surprised by Anderson's. He could fight that well without resorting to his brain's crystal power.

"Hey, kid, why aren't you using your power?" the burly man asked.

Anderson replied, without stopping his attacks and always aiming at the openings the old men left for the student to see.

"I can't, sir..." he said while punching at the old man.

"Why so?" the burly man asked.

"Because I would blow up the whole building..." Anderson replied, avoiding a punch.

The burly man's curiosity was immediately piqued. He turned to look at the man at the desk and said, "Dano, who is this kid?"

"His name is Anderson Worthington," Dano said. "Sixteen-year-old BRHO3C, his power allows him to generate explosions from his body, but apparently, he has no control over them. He would indeed make a mess, but not anything that our walls wouldn't be able to sustain."

The burly man turned to look at Anderson, who was still trying to land a hit on him.

"Oh? So you do never use your power?" the man asked.

"No, sir!"

"AH! I like you, kid, and you are even a good fighter at that!" the burly man said.

"Thank you, sir!" Anderson replied. After five more minutes, the burly man decided it was enough.

"All right, I want actually to give you rank 380. Is it ok for you?" the burly man asked.

"Yes, sir, it would be an honor!" Anderson replied.

"Good, did you hear me, Dano? Give him rank 380!" the burly man said while laughing.

"Yes, sir," Dano replied.

Benedict observed the match intently. He never did see another guy fight like that, and he saw his fair share of strong dudes. He then saw Amber, Gwen, Floyd, and Erik nod at the result, and he went close to Erik.

"Did you perhaps know this guy?"

"Anderson?" Erik asked. "Yes, he is from our same school; we were in the same group of students who joined the Red Palace..."

"Can you introduce us?" Benedict asked with his passion burning in his chest. Erik could swear he saw his eyes glistening for a moment.

"Yes...but...why so?" Erik asked, scared of what this guy would do.

"I want to fight him," Benedict replied.

"What?"

"You heard me. He is strong. I want to fight him..."

"If you say so," Erik replied.

From there, the burly man was mainly disappointed by the students. After Nathaniel and Anderson, he did expect the other students from New Alexandria's high school to be at least at that level, but he was gravely mistaken.

It wasn't like the students were not good, but they were average by the Red Palace's standards. He was only satisfied with Amber's performance, who got the internal rank 400, very close to Anderson's and Nathaniel's. Erik giggled when he imagined how mad Nathaniel would be once he learned the scores.

The other's turn quickly came; Floyd got rank 997, while Gwen got 785. As much as Benedict told him, these were terrific results.

Generally, new students usually got ranked between 3000 and 2000, and already being under the 1000th rank was a colossal achievement. Benedict clearly understood that Erik's friends were strong, and since they were that strong, his expectations for his roommate were high.

Later, Erik's turn finally came. His friends, Benedict and even Anderson waited to see the young man's score. The first thing the young man did was go to the strength machine. He quickly went in front of the machine, and then Dano said, "Punch it with all your strength, young man!"

So, Erik went into a punching stance, and after a couple of seconds of concentration, he punched hard at the machine.

BIP BIP BIP BIP BIP BIP BIP

The machine made a series of noises, and then the screen showed a number that read 19. That was a very high score compared to most other students, including Amber, Floyd, and Gwen.

Still, it was lower than Anderson's and Nathaniel's. A smile formed on the boy's face. He knew he had done well, and now everyone else would know too. Erik matured a lot during this month, but he was still obsessed with what the other people thought about him.

"19 points of strength," Dano said, but then he looked at Erik's file and became confused. "This is weird..."

"What?" the burly man said.

"The kid shows a strength level equal to an RHO2, Idor scale, but he is only SIGMA2..." Dano said.

"What? SIGMA2? How is it possible that such trash could join the Red Palace?" the burly man said. However, he quickly recalled how Erik had just scored 19 on the strength testing device. "Never mind. Keep going."

"Yes, sir."

Erik ignored the old man's words, was perfectly aware of his situation and was already risking a lot by showing everyone the disparity between his power rank and strength. Besides, there was something else that the young man was thinking about, the fact that this device accurately assessed his strength as shown by the system.

<Problematic...> Erik thought.

After that came the treadmill. Erik could reach a speed of 30 kilometers per hour and keep that pace for 24 minutes. That excellent score immediately put the young man under the spot.

"Weird," Dano said while he took notice of the score and kept reading the young man's file.

After that, the third test came, Erik had to avoid a series of projectiles that increased in speed and strength, and the first one to hit him would stop the test.

The first hundred projectiles were a breeze for the young man, the following 200 became a little bit harder to evade, while the last 300 were hard to avoid. Erik stopped at the 405 projectile, which hit him in the face, making him almost fall to the ground.

The machine's body showed a massive 25 on the screen.

"25 dexterity!" Dano shouted.

<These machines can accurately determine my physical stats...> Erik thought.

Dano was increasingly confused by Erik's score and started obsessively reading his file. Something like that never happened in the institution's long history. Probably in the whole of human history.

After reading for a while, Dano called the burly man.

"Sir, you must come here."

"What? Why?" the man replied.

"Just come here..."

The burly man quickly went to the desk and started reading the file that Dano was indicating. At that moment, Erik understood that they had figured out he was an awakener.

The two glanced at the young man at the same time. Dano with a surprised look, while the burly man with a huge smile.

"I would have never thought of seeing an awakener in my entire life..." the burly man said.

"What? An awakener?" a Red Palace student said.

"Did I hear that wrong?" Another asked.

Benedict looked at Erik, stunned, while the students from New Alexandria didn't say anything.

"Why wasn't I informed about this?" the burly man suddenly said.

"That's because you just said out loud what the young man is, despite being written on caps that this information had to remain secret, sir..."

"HA! Well, never mind now. What's done cannot be changed!" the man shouted. "C'mon, young man, let me see what you can do!"

### Chapter 132: The tests (3)

However, Erik immediately stood in front of the burly man and went into a fighting stance. Now that he was in front of the man and observed him better. He was a very tall middle-aged man, at least 2 meters tall; he was the tallest man Erik had ever seen.

The man had a massive body; his shoulders were at least 70 centimeters broad, his arms were insanely thick his legs looked like tree trunks. GIGANTIC was the only adjective to describe the man. And then there were those two enormous hands...

The man had black hair greyed on the side near his temple by time. His eyes were deep brown with wrinkles around them from age lines. No color or shine was left on his face because it was completely covered with scars. Those weren't just old scars either; they appeared fresh and new, as if the wounds still hurt when touched.

And yet, despite all these features, one thing caught Erik's attention: the man's long nose. In general, the impression Erik had was that the man was rather primitive, and by observing his previous interactions, he was a very rude man.

However, for many reasons, it was clear that he had to be insanely strong. Not only because of his physical build but because he taught at the Red Palace, an honor not many people had.

As the burly man saw Erik's stance, he was immediately disappointed.

"What is that half-assed posture? Stand properly!" he shouted.

Erik tried to go into the best stance he could. However, he couldn't, and the burly man started shouting.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING, YOU LITTLE PRICK? DO YOU CALL THAT A STANCE?"

Erik was mortified. However, he couldn't reply to the burly man since he would have probably done something to his rank if he did.

"I'm sorry, sir, but I just recently started fighting..." Erik embarrassedly said.

"WHEN?" the burly man asked.

"A month and a half ago..."

"WHAT?!..." he tried to calm down a little bit, and after a deep sigh, he said, "Never mind then, just attack me with all you got..." visibly disappointed.

Then Erik channeled his power and started attacking the man.

"NO, NO, NO! WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING?!" the burly man shouted, embarrassing Erik even more.

Not only was Erik not able to punch or kick as he should've, but he also missed all the openings that the burly man was purposefully showing.

The awkward test lasted ten minutes, with the burly man swearing at Erik and saying how bad his martial arts were. After these long and humiliating ten minutes ended, the burly man said, "Dano, give him position 3543."

Erik's friend looked at the teacher with disconcerted looks, but there was nothing they could do about it.

"What?" Erik shouted. Despite getting higher scores on the other tests, he got a visibly worse position than all his friends.

"What? You are not happy?" the burly man said. "And I was even generous with you!"

Recalling Nathaniel's earlier situation, Erik replied, trying to look as humble as possible.

"It's not that, sir, just that I don't understand this score..." Erik, he didn't have as much fighting experience as Anderson, Amber or Nathaniel. However, he was also told he had improved; he got better and learned a lot quickly, and what the man said left a bitter aftertaste. This was the reason why Erik was confused.

"How can't you understand?" the burly man said. "You suck at martial arts. Your brain crystal power is so-so and clearly best suited to be used with weapons, yet you use it on your body. Aside from that, you could only last this long because of your physical statistics, which you do not deserve by any means. I'm disappointed, young man. I thought awakeners were tough guys."

"But, sir!"

"No, buts! Or I will lower the score even more!"

The people surrounding Erik, even some of the students from New Alexandria, started laughing at the young man, who was visibly angry at that point. Yet, he didn't say anything that could worsen his situation. With that, the awakener left the stage and went to his friends.

Amber, Gwen, Floyd, and Benedict approached Erik, who was visibly upset by the rank he had just got.

"Hey..." Amber said. "Don't worry about it... your situation is understandable."

"Yeah, man, don't worry, you will have much time to learn..." Floyd added.

"I don't understand. I thought I improved a lot during this month. Professor McAllister even said that I got to a good level, yet, this person is saying the opposite," Erik said.

"Erik. We are talking about a Red Palace teacher. His standards will be much higher than every other person out there," Gwen said. "Besides, despite having improved a lot, you still have a lot of flaws, but it is understandable since you started recently. We had all our lives to learn how to fight, while you didn't. Don't worry about it too much..."

Somehow, Gwen's harsh reply was the only thing that made the young man feel better.



Benedict got closer to the young man, "So, you are an awakener, eh?" the young man asked. Erik looked at the guy and nodded.

"But there is nothing good about it, Benedict. I only got problems since I decided to tell people I was."

"Oh... I'm sorry to hear," Benedict replied.

"Nevermind..."

Once all the students got their tests done, Dano started talking, "As you should all know, you will be forced to fight at least once a week to maintain your rank. However, you can actually fight as many people as you can for as long as you want. If you do this, you should be able to increase your rank, and it is clear that once you reach the squire rank, you will get better benefits.

So, try to improve, increase your current position and strive for success," Dano concluded.

With that, everyone dispersed into groups. Erik, Amber, Gwen, Floyd, and Benedict headed toward the first floor, not knowing what else to do.

Erik was in a reasonably visible bad mood, but the others appeared to be normal in Benedict's eyes. The young man was very curious about these three people. To have such high ranks, they were for sure the best of their school.

For him, it was weird that Erik was so low-ranked compared to them. Still, he recalled that he was an awakener but that he had just started fighting recently, so everything started to make sense. For sure, he met an interesting group of people.

"Well, are you satisfied with your rank?" Benedict asked after a few minutes of walking.

"I don't really like my result," Erik said.

"Yeah, I figured that out, but you all?" he said while looking at Amber, Floyd, and Gwen.

"Yes."

"I do."

"Yeah..."

Despite being sad, Erik didn't want his mood to affect him and the others that much, so he decided to check his quests.

<System, show me the daily quests,> he thought.

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[Quests List]

{Daily}

<Eating Habits: COMPLETE.>

-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.)

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<I have yet to make this quest...>

"Hey guys, mind going to train?"

"Yeah, it is a great idea!" Benedict said.

"Sure, bro!" Floyd replied.

And so, the five went to the gym. The group of friends quickly went toward the elevator, and once they were on the first floor, they headed to the gym with Benedict leading the way.

"Are you sure you know where we are going?" Amber asked.

"Don't worry! I know this place like my pockets!" Benedict eagerly replied.

Chapter 133: A little sparring

As soon as they arrived at the gym, Amber, Floyd, and Gwen were left amazed by the place.

"Wow! This area is huge!" Floyd said.

The gym was bigger than any other the three saw, and the sheer number of training items left them flabbergasted.

"Pretty nice, eh?" Benedict said. "We can use whatever we want here, so suit yourself..."

Then Benedict scanned the room and saw three familiar people, Anderson, Aaron, and Mikey. They probably had the same idea of training. The young man turned to Erik while pointing at the three and said.

"You told me you would introduce us..." Erik looked at him. "I can if you want..."

"Yes, please." Erik had just met Benedict, but it was clear that the latter was a battle junkie since he wanted to meet Anderson to ask him for a fight.

Clearly, the other three heard Benedict, so they simply started to walk in Anderson's direction, despite Floyd being reluctant.

As they got close to the three students, Anderson noticed them and smiled charmingly. Then Aaron and Mikey saw the approaching students too.

"Hey guys," Erik greeted them with an easy smile. "My friend here, Benedict," he said while pointing at his roommate, "Was impressed by your fighting prowess and was wondering if you would be OK sparring with him."

Anderson was by no means an amiable person. He gave his all for those he loved, but aside from that, he treated everyone based on their strength.

That explained why he was cold toward Erik initially but started treating him nicely once he awakened. The young man was slightly worried he wouldn't accept the fight, but since he knew how obsessed Anderson was with training, he hoped he would.

Here everyone was strong, so there was no reason for him not to accept based on some sort of prejudice.

Anderson observed Benedict. He was actually shorter than him and not very muscular. However, he looked like a strong guy and was part of the Red Palace, so the young man decided to accept his challenge.

Anderson then nodded and pointed to the fighting area in the corner of the room.

"Go ahead, then."

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After getting into the ring, Benedict looked like a kid in a candy store. Before starting the fight, Anderson decided to set some rules.

"Ok, I don't want to make this a dangerous fight, so let's only use martial arts. Is it ok with you?"

"Yes," Benedict replied.

"To quit the fight before anything bad happens, we can surrender by saying I QUIT. All right?"

"Yes, yes..."

"Good, let's start then."

Everyone was naturally curious about Benedict's strength. As much as Erik said to Floyd, Amber, and Gwen, the guy was not from New Alexandria, and they were eager to know how strong people from other cities were.

"Ready? FIGHT!" Erik said, and immediately Benedict went straight forward without even looking around first.

His eyes were set only on Anderson, who stood before him. Once the two opponents locked gazes, Benedict made a fist and punched Anderson directly in the face.

Anderson simply evaded the attack and replied in kind with a punch of his own. However, Benedict wasn't a pushover and avoided the attack. However, he was surprised by the move; no one had ever been able to do something like that to him.

"Nice try," Anderson said calmly. To these words, Benedict smiled.

It was then Anderson's turn to attack. He raised his leg to kick his opponent in the head. Benedict parried the move but found himself unable to evade a third one.

In fact, by using the momentum he gained, Anderson jumped in the air and unleashed another kick with his other leg, hitting Benedict in the chest. It didn't hurt him that much, but the force of the blow knocked the air out of him, forcing him to take several steps back. However, he kept smiling at Anderson.

"That was good," Benedict commented, still dizzy from the lack of oxygen.

"Thank you," Anderson replied.

They circled each other cautiously, trying to figure out what to do next. Suddenly, Benedict lunged toward him and threw a spinning kick at his abdomen. To avoid the attack, Anderson stepped backward, but his opponent was relentless and charged at him again.

"The guy is pretty strong," Floyd said.

"Indeed, he has good foundations," Gwen replied.

Erik and Amber observed the fight, with the first wishing to become as good as them. Luckily, the young man had the system on his side, and having increased dexterity the last time; he was bound to have an easier time training.

"He's fast," Erik remarked, referring to Benedict while observing the fight.

"Yeah..." Amber agreed. "So far, he's holding his own against Anderson, but he won't be able to do it for much longer."

Erik nodded. Anderson was too strong, and even if Benedict was good at fighting, there was no way he would lose in a melee match.

At that moment, a girl approached the ring and started watching the fight. Then, Anderson blocked Benedict's attack and countered with his left hand. Benedict dodged it easily and retaliated with a punch aimed at his opponent's stomach, which he parried by raising his right leg.

However, Anderson found an opening into Benedict's defenses, the only one he showed during the whole fight. Gwen naturally noticed it too, "He lost," she said, and then Anderson grabbed the young man by the arm and threw him on the ground.

Benedict didn't feel pain since the ring was fully padded. However, Anderson placed his foot on his throat and firmly declared, "I won."

That was the moment when everyone would understand what kind of guy Benedict was. Was he the arrogant type who couldn't even accept a loss like Nathaniel, or was he a good guy who would see this defeat as an opportunity to improve his skills?

"I quit," Benedict said. It was clear to all what kind of man he was.

Anderson then helped him stand up. "You fought well, Benedict..."

"Thank you," the young man replied. "I had a lot of fun; thank you for the match also!"

"You are welcome!"

At that moment, Benedict turned to look around, only to see the young woman watching the fight.

"Martha!" he shouted.

"Hey, Benny!" the young woman replied.

"You do know each other?" Erik asked.

"Yes, she came to my same high school; she is a friend of mine!" Benedict said happily.

"Hi, I'm Martha," the woman shyly said.

"Hi, Martha! I'm Amber!"

"I'm Gwen."

One by one, the others introduced themselves to her, including Aaron and Mikey. After the fight, Gwen felt obliged to compliment Benedict, "Nice fighting style," she told him.

"Thanks!" Benedict exclaimed.

With that, the students decided it was time to start training. Erik was the first one to do so since he still had to work at the farm, or better, he had to go there to hunt Thaid. At the moment, the job at the farm was simply an excuse he used to go to the northern district, where the breach was located.

Erik worked out for an hour, and as soon as he did, the usual notification rang inside his ears.

[DAILY QUEST COMPLETE.]

<Finally>

Since it was still early in the morning, Erik kept training and spent the next hours perfecting his martial art moves. However, what the burly man said resonated with him.

It was true that his power was well suited to be used with a weapon, so the young man decided to do something about it. Learning how to wield a sword wasn't going to be bad. However, he needed to find a teacher to learn it. Fortunately, soon melee weapon combat class was going to start.

Chapter 134: Inappropriate questions

"You know, I'm really starting to like this place," Erik said as they stretched after a particularly grueling workout. "I've never seen so many people working out before." He said, glancing at his friends, who nodded with him.

"It's different here than back at school," Floyd replied between breaths. His muscles were already pumped from all their training.

He didn't seem winded by it one bit despite having just finished an exhausting sprint on the treadmill, followed up by some weight lifting on top of more running.

In fact, if anyone looked worse for wear now, it was Martha. Her face had gone beet red due to over-exertion and sweat pouring off her brow. The young woman wasn't talkative, but they let her stay with them while training since she was Benedict's friend. After all, they didn't want to sound rude, and judging by the ease with which she trained, she had to be strong.

"Do you need my help, Martha?" Benedict asked.

The group started with only Amber, Gwen, Erik, Floyd, Benedict, and Martha. Still, following the spar between Benedict and Anderson, the latter, Aaron, and Mikey joined the group.



It was weird to see since the three didn't usually mingle with Amber and company, probably due to Floyd. But here, in this new environment that the Red Palace represented, with thousands of students training to improve and become stronger, most of them being in the military, it was better for the three to be in a larger group.

As Erik trained, he often heard other's people conversations. They mainly described how hellish the military life was and how hard it was compared to their previous one.

Erik understood something from those conversations: First, joining the militaries didn't mean that a member had to quit at the Red Palace.

On the contrary, they were encouraged to train their fighting skills here, do sparring matches, and learn weapons during the morning while attending regular military classes during the evening.

Drills, survival training, Thaid hunting, and the likes were all things that the military taught, clearly offering other kinds of training for those who weren't strong enough to join the Red Palace.

It seemed like this institution was deeply rooted in the government and the military as if they were part of each other.

"So, what are we going to do this afternoon?" Amber asked the group.

"I don't know, I would like to train," Gwen said.

"You want to train more?" Amber said.

"The lessons will start tomorrow, so it would be better to be in top shape," She replied.

"Yeah, I agree," Anderson said.

"I can't," Erik said, making everyone turn in his direction. "I have to work."

"Work?" Benedict said. "What do you mean? Isn't your father or mother supporting you?" To be honest, Benedict was a little bit dense, so he didn't think about the fact that maybe Erik was alone.

"My mother died when I was a child, and my father went missing years ago..." Erik said, making his friends' mood plummet.

It was the first time they had heard this information from their friend. They were obviously aware of his family trouble, but it wasn't easy for them to make Erik talk about it.

It wasn't their business anyway, so they refrained from talking about it. Anderson was slightly embarrassed by the question since they were not friends with Erik and the others, so he felt like he was hearing something he shouldn't.

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear it, but I still don't get it. Here you have food and accommodation; why do you keep working?" Benedict asked.

"Because I like it," Erik said. It was true that he liked farming life, but the real reason why he wanted to go there was to go hunt Thaidis.

"You like working? What kind of job do you do?" Benedict asked.

"He works on a farm! He is the plant hugger," Floyd said, teasing him a little bit.

"Hey! Don't make fun of him!" Amber said.

"Plant hugger?" Benedict asked.

"It's related to my birth power. I can make plants grow faster and stronger... It's almost useless during fights, but it is useful outside of this context," Erik said.

"Well, the important thing is that you like it," Benedict said, leaving everyone speechless, Erik included. Amber was the first one to say that he had a beautiful power, but the young man was the first to say that the only thing that mattered was for him to like it.

The truth was that Erik hated his power for many years, but since he got the system, he could see how helpful it was to have a brain crystal power like that.

He was bound to never starve essentially, and could also be used in particular situations, some of which would be particularly useful once he escaped the country.

Time flew by during training, and the nine friends decided to go eat once their training was done and lunchtime arrived.

"Hey, Benedict," Floyd said, quickly gaining the young man's attention. "How did you manage to join the Red Palace?"

The young man looked at them curiously. "Why?"

"We thought that maybe you had connections inside," Amber said.

"I just applied," Benedict answered. "Then I had to undergo several tests, but could go past them easily."

"You were lucky then to have passed them. Instead, we had to participate in a tournament held by the school. Who had some reserved spots essentially."

"Yes, well, I guess I had been lucky," Benedict replied.

Anderson gave the two boys a look.

"Luck? Are you sure about that?" Anderson said.

"Why wouldn't I be?" Floyd replied coldly.

"It looks to me that he is plenty strong to join this establishment," Anderson said.

"Thank you, Anderson," Benedict replied.

"I wasn't implying he is not strong. I saw the spar with everybody else."

"Just stop it, guys," Gwen said, stopping whatever was going to start.

Erik then finished eating, "All right guys, it is better I go to the farm. I can't be late..."

"Ok, bro!" Floyd said.

"Have a nice trip," Amber added.

With that, Erik left the cafeteria, went to his room to retrieve his backpack with some spare clothes in case his current ones got stained with blood and left the Red Palace.

He obviously had to take the train in order to get there. The train station was located in a building similar to the one in the eastern district.

It was a tall building with floating tracks coming out from the last thirty floors and on which countless trains traveled on.

Fast-moving metal tubes that didn't make a sound as they sped up between buildings. The young man took the elevator and quickly arrived at the designated floor, and there, he waited for the train to arrive.

If the building was very similar to the ones in the other districts, the people waiting for the train weren't. The majority of them were soldiers wearing Frant's military uniforms. Some of these were a couple of years older than Erik and were talking to their friends about this and that.

The train arrived soon at the station, and Erik boarded it. He couldn't wait for it to arrive in the northern district. He hoped that he would be able to hunt as many thaids as he did last time and quickly increase his level.

If he did, the best thing to do would be to increase his dexterity to train more efficiently and learn faster. However, he was also curious about the effects of intelligence. Erik decided not to waste time anymore; he had to become stronger as soon as possible and planned to train all day to make neural links once he returned from the farm.

After a little time, the train finally arrived at the northern district, and Erik started walking on the unpaved road, heading to the breach. On his way, he passed by a few farms where farmers tended to crops or animals.

There were no skyscrapers here. Instead, large warehouses and barns stood side by side. As he walked further northward, the houses became less numerous. Eventually, after passing through the wheat field, he reached the breach.

#### Chapter 135: A weird situation (1)

Erik had to improve. There wasn't anything else he had to do, and to reach his goal, he needed to learn how to fight properly and improve his strength. However, being under the government's control was a problem.

He couldn't increase his Energy because he would be tested again once he enrolled in military school. As for strength and speed, he had to fake it being lower since it would arouse suspicions. Erik had no idea how things would be once he left the country, but he wouldn't have to hide.

As Erik walked past the breach, he ended up in the forest's heart. The young man moved toward the location where the Lomalins were most likely to be found, the clearing a couple of kilometers from the breach.

Once he arrived, however, he saw an uncountable number of Lomalins. They were much more than the other day, but most were very tiny. Erik inspected them all and found that most of the thaids were just born.

"What the hell is happening?"

It looked like the Lomalins were reproducing at high speeds. In fact, they seemed to be doing so as quickly as possible.

Erik was confident that something would happen to the city soon, and he was sure it was related to the thaids outside their natural habitat that roamed here.

However, he didn't see anything out of the ordinary in recent days, like when he found the Leylarhad and the Criculs.

<Maybe that is because they are scared of the Lomalins,> Erik thought.

He wasn't wholly right, but he wasn't that off the mark, either.

<I mean, I would be scared too of their ugly faces...>

After all, aside from their ugly faces, they were basically long-legged worms. No, the sheer number of creatures was what really scared other thaids.

Erik grew restless just by looking at their sheer numbers. The last time he saw them, the Lomalins were around a thousand, but now there were at least 5-7 times that amount.

Everywhere Erik laid his eyes, he found a Lomalin. That meant the population growth rate must have been incredibly fast, far faster than any species Erik knew, but that wasn't normal.

However, thanks to the thaid compendium he downloaded some time ago, Erik knew that Lomalins did try to increase their numbers on certain occasions, and one of them was when they felt threatened. By what, Erik didn't know, yet, it was clear that something was scaring the beasts.

With such numbers, this place was bound to become infested by Lomalins, who would quickly destroy the surroundings and prey on weaker creatures. That was a problem Erik couldn't solve, and he had no intention of telling the military about this.

However, something told Erik to go deeper inside the forest and find out what was happening.

In the distance, Erik saw the usual ancient tree covered in moss and the gigantic boulder in the middle of the enormous clearing and around them all that Lomalins.

Erik decided the best thing to do was to kill enough Lomalins to level up and then head deeper into the forest to look around.

However, Erik wanted to try a different tactic this time. His thoughts trailed when he killed his first thaid, the Densoph, and how he did it.

He used his power to grow huge trees which he used to squish the creature, and that was exactly what the young man decided to do now.

Since he didn't have a power that allowed him to kill in an area, Erik thought that the best thing to do to kill as many Lomalins as possible was to throw countless trees at them.

It was the closest thing he had to an AoE attack. So, Erik, before coming to the breach, stopped at a grocery store and bought fifty apples.

Each of them had around 3-5 seeds meaning 3-5 trees on average from each apple, and he had fifty. However, that tactic worked only because the Lomalins were weak. A Cricul would have been able to evade or even destroy the tree with its mighty strength.

Erik took cover amidst the bushes and started channeling mana. Soon, in a radius of three meters, everything started growing in a matter of seconds, further decreasing Erik's chances of being found out.

At that moment, the seeds inside the apples started growing, so Erik threw the bag containing the fifty apples. Immediately, the seeds grew into trees, gaining speed as their weight increased.

From teeny tiny, the seeds became giant trees around 11-12 meters and quickly obscured the sky over the Lomalins. After a couple of seconds, a thunderous sound appeared in the forest.

As the trees touched the ground, the Lomalins started being squished. Their body parts got scattered through the clearance, staining the ground and even the lucky Lomalins who were not directly under the trees. Erik didn't know how many died, but they were much more than usual.

[MULTIPLE HOSTILE LOMALINS KILLED: MANA ABSORBING PROCESS STARTING.]

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

[MANA SUCCESSFULLY ABSORBED, STARTING CONVERTING PROCEDURE.]

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

[MANA SUCCESSFULLY CONVERTED INTO EXPERIENCE. 8000 EXPERIENCE POINTS AWARDED TO THE HOST.]

[LEVEL UP.]

[LEVEL UP.]

[NEW POWERS UNLOCKED!]

Erik looked at the notification in front of him with joy. The number of experience points awarded to him made his mouth water.

"Level 15!" the young man said. He had just leveled up twice. However, he had to kill a lot of Lomalins to do that, much more than the last time.

"A shame I don't have any more seeds..."

Then, the young man, who was still hidden inside the giant bushes he had created, observed the last notification.

"New powers unlocked? What will these be?"

"System, show me the status!" Erik said, and the usual screen appeared in front of his eyes.

-----

[Host Information]

NAME: Erik Romano

AGE: 16

SYSTEM LEVEL: 15

POWER LEVEL: 56



EXPERIENCE: 2453.825/2944

DNA POINTS: 1760

HEALTH: 840/840

MANA: 770/770

{Attributes}

[Powers]

{Biological Super Computer Powers}

-Brain Crystal Manipulation

-Brain Crystal Power Extraction

(Allows the absorption of the brain crystal, allowing the host to acquire the power within. Notice: the DNA must be changed to allow the body to use the power. See DNA extraction.)

-Brain Crystal power Merging

(Allows to merge two powers birthing a new one. It requires the merging of the DNA to work)

- (LOCKED)

- (LOCKED)

- Brain Crystal Power Strengthening

(Allows the gaining of the energy attribute points)

(LOCKED)

-DNA Manipulation

-DNA Extraction

(Allows the absorption of foreign DNA, allowing the host to replicate it inside his own body.  
Notice: Changing the DNA is a slow process, and it is required to use new brain crystal powers.)

-DNA Merging

(Allows to merge two DNAs, birthing a new one. Required to accommodate merged powers.)

- (LOCKED)

- (LOCKED)

-DNA Strengthening

(Allows the gaining of the Strength, Intelligence, and Dexterity attribute points)

(LOCKED)

- Analysis

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

-Brain Information Injector

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

## -Device Manipulation

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

{Host's Powers}

{Skills}

As Erik observed his status, he saw how two new voices appeared. DNA and Brain Crystal Power merging. According to what the system said, it allowed the fusion of two powers to create a new one.

"It's incredible!" Erik said while thinking already about what he could merge. However, since he was still inside the forest and countless Lomalins roamed around, the young man quickly focused his attention on the thaids.

The creatures were in a frenzy, trying to understand what the hell it did happen to their brethren. Some were running away, but most were searching around for predators.

As soon as they realized that trees had come down on them, they panicked, not understanding why such a thing happened, and started scurrying away from the clearance.

"Next time, I will bring more apples..." Erik said, eager to earn much more experience. Some of the Lomalins were nudging at their fallen brethren to see if they were dead.

There was carnage all around them, with squished bugs, limbs everywhere, and blood smeared all over the ground.

"What a mess," Erik whispered.

*A*W000  
00

"SHIT!" Erik knew who this howl belonged to, Leylarhads, the wolf-like creatures. Erik did assume that a pack had to be nearby since a cub was around there, yet, he didn't see them previously. Since the fake awakener killed a lot of Lomalins, he assumed that the beasts smelled blood and came to see what was happening.

The young man tried to keep his composure, but it was clear that the situation wasn't good and that he would die if he didn't run away soon.

From a distance, he saw at least 30 Leylarhads observing the Lomalins. As soon as the latter saw the much bigger thaids, they started aggressively and ferociously looking at them.

Trying to intimidate them. The Lomalins were many times more than the Leylarhads and much stronger. However, the wolf-like thaids weren't smart enough to use Erik's same tactic and kill the Lomalins when outnumbered.

So, a stalemate between the two races began, with the Lomalins using their numbers as protection and the Leylarhads intimidating them with their strength and dimension.

Chapter 136: A weird situation (2)

A stare-off ensued between the two species. However, the Lomalins were already restless because of Erik's attack, which they blamed on the Leylarhads, and for this reason, increasing the hostility between the two races.

However, the insect-like thaids were very agitated since they knew that with 1600 fewer individuals, their entire colony was facing a huge risk against the wolves.

Erik couldn't get out of his hiding spot yet, lest being seen by the Leylarhads. He could escape the Lomalins but not the wolves. So, he stayed there, hiding.

<I don't get it. Why are the Leylarhads here? Weren't they scared of the Lomalins and their huge numbers?>

Erik wasn't far off from the truth. However, there was something he wasn't aware of: on the other side of the clearing, opposite the Leylarhads' position, a different beast was approaching the group of Lomalins. It was most likely drawn to the smell of blood that was coming from within the group.

Once the creature appeared, the Lomalins saw it and panicked.

RAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAWR

As soon as the young man heard the huge roar, he peered through the thick foliage and saw a beast as terrifying as one taken from a horror movie.

The thaid was the biggest Erik had ever seen, easily seven meters tall and at least fifteen meters long. It was a weird lizard-like thing covered in scales; its skin looked scaly with some patch of fur all over. It was bizarre.

The monster was a sort of bipedal with a long tail helping it stand, and it had two long frontal arms with thick and long claws as sharp as razors. Those claws alone would have been enough to kill any opponent within seconds.

Its head looked weird, like a gecko's, but once it opened its mouth, it revealed rows upon rows of sharp teeth, and its eyes were reptilian. It was too big to be killed.

Thanks to the compendium he downloaded, Erik knew what it was. Still, contrary to the Leylarhads, this thaid belonged to these parts. It was a Crombo, the natural predator of the Lomalins.

The monster wore an animalistic grin; its fangs extended past its lips, ending just above its upper jawline. The thaid towered even on the Leylarhads, usually two meters tall beasts, that were looking at the Crombo with fear. However, the beasts had a murderous and expectant glint in their eyes.

<No way...> Erik thought. A dark thought spread inside the awakener's mind. <The Leylarhads waited for the Crombo to come!>

The most likely situation was that the wolf-like creatures were looking at Erik killing the Lomalins, knowing that the smell of their's blood would have attracted the Crombo.

Alternatively, maybe they were responsible for attracting the beast toward the Lomalins, meaning that Erik ended here at the wrong time. Regardless, the young man had to reconsider thaid's intelligence.

RAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAWR

The Crombo roared again, pushing its massive body toward the Lomalins like a train. With every step it took, the ground trembled, and the Lomalins started running away in a panicked state.

However, the Leylarhads were waiting for them as they tried to stop the Lomalins from escaping. They charged straight toward the fleeing Lomalins, who were trying desperately to reach safety.

"What is going on?" asked Erik. "Why aren't they fighting back?!"

It was true that the Crombo was the Lomalins' natural predator, but it was weird that despite their vast numbers, they decided to flee rather than try to kill their opponent.

However, they didn't, and after a couple of strides, the Crombo ended up in the middle of the clearing, and soon carnage ensued.

The Crombo stomped over a lot of Lomalins, creating a gelatinous substance under its foot made of the beasts' blood and flesh. Some other Lomalins were killed by its tail, while others were ripped to shreds by its claws.

While the thaid killed Lomalins, the Leylarhad rushed toward the bugs and started ripping them to shred with their maws. The Lomalins were too scared to fight back and ignored the wolves, that kept their distance from the bigger beast.

Both Leylarhads and the Crombo started feasting on the Lomalin's corpses soon after. They tore apart the carcasses, consuming their organs, flesh, and bones. In minutes, nothing was left of the Lomalins' bodies they were munching on. Their entrails scattered around the area, making it look like a massacre site.

"That's gross!" said Erik, disgusted by the sight.

The thaid continued to eat until all the Lomalins fled or there weren't any Lomalin alive. Then, the giant beast turned around and walked back into the forest without leaving so much as a single body behind.

Once the beast disappeared, the Leylarhads stopped eating the carcasses. Instead, they started licking themselves clean. Then they left the clearing, heading who knew where.

"I have to get the hell out of here!" Erik said. He then went out of the bush and started running away with all his might. Luckily, he was close enough to the breach to reach it within ten minutes, and as he went past it, he stopped in the middle of the wheat field and gasped for air.

"AH... AH... FUCK! WHAT THE HELL IS HAPPENING HERE?!"

It was clear how much the young man was confused, first the abnormal amount of Lomalins, then the Leylarhads, and lastly, the Crombo. Something weird was happening around New Alexandria, and he didn't want to find out what it was.

"I better stop going out for the time being..." Erik said to himself. It was a shame to lose experience like this, but if creatures like that now roamed the forest outside the city, it was better to stay within the barrier.

However, Erik was worried that such beasts could enter through the breach, and it would have been a problem if that had happened, as the military would then find it.

Erik wasn't particularly worried about the city. To be honest, he didn't care if people died or places were destroyed. Besides being stronger than Erik, Leylarhads and Crombos were not that strong compared to other thaids. So, he was sure nothing big would happen because of them since the military would be able to manage them easily.

"Well," he sighed while thinking about his problem, "at least I got two more levels. I even have ten attribute points to distribute. Besides, I have to check what the new powers do."

Erik then walked toward Mister Fox's farm, and after a short walk, he arrived at the gate. Once there, he saw a car parked in front of the property, and with curiosity in his eyes, Erik walked inside the land.

However, there was no one in the front. The awakener then walked to the back of the house, and it was there that he saw the old man.

He was talking to some Crystal Cross gang members, who probably came here again to extort him some money. That was probably the reason why there were no workers today.

Once he saw Erik, his employer looked the young man in the eyes and said, "You're late. Did something happen?"

"Nothing, Mister Fox," Erik said, looking down. "I just have a lot of training to do..."

"Good." Mister Fox smiled. The gang members then quickly left the farm and headed to their car. "Then let us begin today's work," Mister Fox said as they left his property.

After that, Erik went to the barn to change and then headed to the field, where he started channeling mana in order to unleash his power.

Luckily, Erik now had enough mana to complete his job in a matter of moments, so after completing his work, the young man went to mister Fox to get his payment, and as he did, he left the farm and headed back to the Red Palace.

#### Chapter 137: A new Neural Link

Once Erik returned to the Red Palace, he went to his room after briefly talking to Benedict. It was understandable; he wasn't really there to interact with other people but to train.

"I'll be training for a while," he shouted to Benedict as soon as he entered his bedroom.

"OK!" Benedict replied from the other room.

Erik then changed into more comfortable clothes and headed straight toward the bed, where he planned to stay for the remaining of the day.

Time quickly flew by, with the young man in the lotus position trying to make new neural links. Since he had fixed his deformity problem, Erik started this training routine to make new neural links.

He still was at a lower level compared to all the other people his age, so he had much work to do to catch up. However, making neural links was not easy, and he always felt like he was making no progress at all.

"Dammit..." His voice echoed through his room. He spent four hours training, and it seemed like he made no progress. Though, the young man didn't quit and kept making neural links for the rest of



the evening. It was only after he reached the six hours mark that Erik could sense something different.

<C'mon, I'm almost there...> the young man thought. Focusing on channeling mana from and to his brain crystal.

The feeling was the same as ever, and it grew stronger as time passed. The mana contained inside his cranium was whirling and flowing rapidly around the brain, creating a weird heating sensation.

And as Erik felt the flow reaching its apex, the young man's mana surged and rapidly spread inside his body. This continued until he started to sense that the ethereal substance connected his brain with the crystal within it.

A tiny mana thread connected the brain and the crystal as a mini bridge. After a few seconds had gone, the phenomena started to fade away until it was to the point where he could no longer feel anything.

<I made it!> Erik thought in happiness. That was just but a small step to becoming stronger, yet, it felt incomparably satisfactory for the awakener as if he suddenly became a master. The new neural link was related to the sharpening power.

<System, show me my stats!>

And the usual blue and white window characteristic of the biological supercomputer's power appeared.

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[Host Information]

NAME: Erik Romano

AGE: 16

SYSTEM LEVEL: 15

POWER LEVEL: 59

EXPERIENCE: 2453.825/2944

DNA POINTS: 1760

HEALTH: 840 /840

MANA: 770 /770

{Attributes}

STRENGTH: 20

INTELLIGENCE: 11

DEXTERITY: 26

ENERGY: 37

Available Attributes point: 10

-----

<It's not that bad...> Erik thought. He then looked at the last voice about the available attribute points. <I still have ten... what will I do with them?>

The young man started thinking about what to do next. If he improved his strength, he would fake being weaker, and since going out to the forest with those monsters was akin to suicide, it was useless to improve his already sufficiently high strength.

Then there was Energy; for sure, it was essential to increase it, but he didn't know of any way to fake the amount he had.

The last two options were dexterity and intelligence. The first would allow him to improve faster since his ability to control his own body would increase, but he had already improved his dexterity quite a bit.

The last was intelligence. The young man never directly increased it since he didn't clearly understand what it did.

The system said that this statistic influences a person's ability to think quickly and memory quality. However, something inside him changed whenever Erik got a new neural link and his intelligence increased.

It wasn't just that it was easier for him to recall things or that his thinking speed increased, but it was also that he noticed things he wouldn't have noticed otherwise.

The extra stat points slowly changed the way he thought and allowed him to understand things he couldn't previously understand.

Maybe that was because he was able to think faster, or maybe it was the effect of better memory; Erik didn't know. However, since this stat was there, it meant it had a purpose.

<After all, why not?> the young man thought with a pensive look. And so, he decided to massively boost it to see what would happen in the future. It would be easier to see the difference before and after the rise by increasing it a lot.

<System, increase intelligence by ten points!> the young man thought.

[UNDERSTOOD. INTELLIGENCE INCREASED TO 21]

Erik felt a surge of energy inside his brain, a weird tingling feeling that lasted only for an instant. However, after that, the young man felt nothing, it was as if he didn't increase the stat at all, and he wondered how much the change would affect him.

Erik did look at the clock hung on the wall in front of the bed; it was already 22:00.

"I'm hungry..."

Since he could make a new neural link, the young man decided to quit and head to the cafeteria. Once he got out of his room, he saw Benedict seated on the sofa.

"You took your time, uh?"

"Yeah, I made another neural link. I'm now SIGMA3 with the sharpening power..." Erik said.

Benedict talked to Amber and the others when Erik went to work, so he more or less knew that his roommate had just recently started to develop neural links. He made 3 of them in less than two months, which was an impressive feat. However, he was still behind the others, and as the number of links increased, it became harder to make new ones. However, Benedict was genuinely happy for Erik.

"Congratulations," he said, smiling.

"Thank you!" Erik said.

"I'm heading to the cafeteria then."

"I'll come with you. I haven't eaten yet," Benedict said.

"Why not?"

"I was waiting for you!"

"What? Why?"

"I didn't want to make you eat alone. It would have been depressing. I guess that after a day of training and working, you needed a little company, so I did wait," Benedict said. Erik's impression of him increased a lot.

"Let's go then!"

They headed to the cafeteria together, where they sat at a table and ordered food. Erik was glad that finally, he could go to such places without other people trying to stop him as it happened at school.

If he didn't have that problem, he would have saved a ton of money on food, and he wouldn't even need to cook, also saving a lot of time.

Both Benedict and Erik ordered meat as the main dish, with salad on the side and some carbonated drinks. They chatted until the meal arrived. When it came, the two devoured their meals like wolves, eating everything with great appetite. Erik because the food was great, tasting much better than the one he cooked, while Benedict just because he was a ravenous eater.

"Have you read the email yet?" Benedict asked.

"No, not yet," Eriks said.

"You better do since everything is explained there," Benedict said while giving a bite of the meat.

"I will do it tomorrow. I'm too tired now. Care to tell me what it said?" Erik asked.

"Well, I can't go into full details, but I will tell you this. Tomorrow classes will start; we will do martial art training, weapon training, weightlifting training, and lastly, an obstacle course."

"That's it?" Erik asked.

"Well, what did you expect? This is not a military school. This place has been thought only to teach how to fight..." Benedict said.

The first thing that struck Erik was that they would learn about weapons. The young man had always wanted to know more about blades. In addition, learning to use different kinds of weapons sounded interesting. That was something that he looked forward to.

However, the news of the next day's schedule disappointed Erik, as it wasn't that different compared to what he already did at school.

"And the following days?" Erik said.

"It's always the same. The schedule change according to each individual student. On the first day, we will be evaluated and assigned a weapon to learn. As much as I understood, we cannot choose the weapons since they will be assigned to use by the teachers. Martial art is always the same; even the weightlifting training won't be different from high school.

The schedule will end after launch, and after that, it will be on us to train the neural links."

"It isn't so different compared to high school," Erik said disappointedly.

"Well, if you consider we will have the best teachers the nation has available, and the best resources out there, i won't say they will be exactly the same," Benedict said.

Chapter 138: First Lesson (1)

"Besides, they not only teach different kinds of martial arts but also how to wield different weapons. At the military school, the training is similar, but they also teach theoretical classes."

"Ok, ok... I get it!" Erik said, "When do classes start?"

"At 8!" Benedict said.

"Alright, let's sleep early tonight, then."

When they left the cafeteria, Erik looked outside and saw that night already came. With quick steps, the two went to their room and, after that, to sleep.

\*\*\*

DRIIIIIIIIIN!

"Oh... God..." Erik turned off the alarm clock and groaned as he got up from bed. His mind still felt foggy with fatigue despite having slept for about eight hours last night. After five solid minutes after having woken up, a notification appeared in Erik's eyes.

[SYSTEM NOTIFICATION: QUESTS ARE AGAIN AVAILABLE. NEW TYPES OF REWARDS AVAILABLE.]

"Uh? That was sudden... I wonder what these new types of rewards are..."

Erik contemplated for a couple of seconds, but his sleepy mind could not understand what these new rewards were. Then, the young man asked the system.

<System, what are these new types of reward you are talking about?>

[ANSWER: THE SYSTEM FOUND A WAY TO STORE THE EXCESS ENERGY RELEASED BY THE NEURAL LINK-ESTABLISHING PROCEDURE, AND THAT COULDN'T BE PREVIOUSLY USED. THE BIOLOGICAL SUPERCOMPUTER CAN NOW REWARD ATTRIBUTE POINTS TO THE HOST.]

<Attribute points, uh? This is good news! But wait a moment...> Erik noticed a small thing from the system's words.

<System, are you implying that most of the energy I gathered when doing new neural links got... lost?>

[ANSWER: SINCE THE USER HAS THE ABILITY TO ESTABLISH MORE THAN 54 NEURAL LINKS AND TO INCREASE STATS BY ABSORBING MANA, THE BIOLOGICAL SUPERCOMPUTER HAD TO FIND A WAY TO BALANCE THE NUMBER OF MUTATIONS BROUGHT TO THE BODY. THERE WAS A HUGE RISK FOR THE HOST OF UNWANTED MUTATIONS THAT COULD EVEN LEAD TO DEATH IF THE ENERGY WASN'T DISSIPATED.]

<So, yes... System; if the amount of energy I got from neural links was higher, does this mean I should have gotten more stat points?>

[ANSWER: HOST IS CORRECT. USUALLY, EACH INDIVIDUAL GAINS NINE ATTRIBUTE POINTS WHEN MAKING A NEW NEURAL LINK. STILL, I HAD TO NERF THIS SINCE IF YOU DID GET 9 POINTS FOR EACH NEURAL LINK, YOU WOULD HAVE ALREADY BECOME A MUTANT BEAST. NOW THE PROBLEM HAS BEEN FIXED.]

Naturally, Erik was pissed because he should have had 30 more attribute points from his neural links. Still, somehow he got only three per established link instead of 9.

However, the young man quickly concluded there was nothing he could have done and was at least glad the system found a solution to this problem. It was clear from the biological supercomputer's words that he would get attribute points as quest rewards.

Erik quickly got up from bed, put on his uniform, and headed to the bathroom. Once he got out, he found Benedict sleeping with his room door open.

"Hey, Benedict! We are going to be late!"

"Uhm...? What time is it?" the young man asked while rubbing his eyes.

"It's 7:00 in the morning..." Erik replied, "Get up!"

"Yes... Yes..."

After brushing his teeth, the boy walked to the living room and waited for Benedict to get dressed. Once he did, the two headed to the cafeteria to grab something quick to eat.

"C'mon, I don't want to be late the first day!" Erik said.

"I'm ready!"

Once they arrived at the dining hall, they found many tables lined neatly across each other and filled with food: eggs, sausages, pieces of bread, fruits, etc., alongside juice and coffee or tea. They quickly grabbed something to eat, and after a hearty breakfast, they left the building.

Classes were held in separate buildings, and each rank had one solely dedicated to them. Once outside the Red Palace, they found Amber, Floyd, Gwen, Anderson, Aaron, Mikey, and Martha boarding a bus.

"Hey, Guys!" Erik shouted. The students turned to look at the source of the voice, only to find Erik and Benedict.



"C'mon guys, you are going to be late!" Floyd shouted.

Benedict and Erik quickly went to the bus, and once they found their seats, the young man asked.

"Where is this thing bringing us?"

"To the dojo," Anderson replied.

"Hey, why didn't you say anything about this?" Erik asked Benedict.

"I didn't know," the boy replied.

Erik facepalmed.

"Hey, you didn't know it either!" Benedict replied.

After five minutes, they arrived in front of a massive building with yellow coloration. Erik didn't know why they chose to distinguish buildings by their colors, but whatever the reason, the place looked bigger compared to his old school.

"Alright, guys, let's go inside," Anderson said when they left the bus.

The group followed him into the building. After passing through an entrance, they saw a lobby decorated with pictures of past teachers and students, all wearing the Red Palace uniform. There were also countless chairs and couches here and there, with some students seated there waiting.

Then an old man approached the crowd of students waiting at the door, not knowing what to do.

"Welcome young fellas. I'm master Rook." He said with an impassive look. "You must be all new students, I guess," he said, looking at the hundreds of students in front of him. If this is the case, follow me; we will start evaluating you soon.

With that, the elderly man led them down a flight of stairs and onto another floor. The group followed the instructor inside the building, which was quite big compared to the ones back at school. There were several training rooms, and there were also some areas where people could rest.

Their path took them to several areas where various people were already training. They were all peasant-ranked students but had come to the red palace at least a year prior. Erik and his group passed by these individuals without saying much.

They then passed several doors until finally reaching a big metal double door leading to another corridor. When they reached the end of the hallway, they found themselves facing a large room.

On the walls stood rows upon rows of weapons ranging from swords to spears to bows and arrows, along with shields and other items. They were there purely to embellish the room and had no other purpose.

"Wow, so this is where we will learn how to fight?" Benedict asked.

Master Rook nodded. "However, this is only for the martial art class. For weapon training, you will head to a room based on the teacher you will get assigned."

"If this is the martial art class, why did they hang the weapons here?" Erik muttered, but his comment was unheard by the others.

"So...Welcome, everyone!" Master Rook announced, "This is my dojo. The place where all of you first years will learn hand-to-hand combat from me!" he said. "But today we are not here to learn martial arts but to evaluate you. Soon other teachers will join me, and together, we will assess what will be the best-suited weapon for you.

Of course, if you already have brain crystal powers that allow you to conjure weapons, you better say so. You will be assigned to a master of that weapon. If you have a different kind of power, we will see together what will be the best for you to learn," the teacher concluded.

No one said anything, but many wondered why they didn't do this the previous day instead of wasting a whole day of training to find out the best-suited weapon. The truth was that, as Benedict said, they wanted to give enough time to the students to familiarize themselves with the place and the other students.

This was, after all, a new environment, and the first-year students were generally sixteen-years-old. It wasn't easy for them to suddenly start living outside their houses with a bunch of random people.

"I hope you had enough time to familiarize yourselves with the place because you won't have this leisure anymore," the teacher said while looking at the students.

"Now, as you may know, we really need to understand where your talent lies while handling a weapon. You may wonder why it is required to learn a weapon, and there are multiple reasons. Most of you have a weapon conjuring brain crystal power, and it is clear that to learn how to use such powers training is required," the teacher said.

"But think about this, what will happen if you are on a battlefield with no mana available and no ammunition in your rifle, and multiple thaids around you? You will be sitting ducks!" he shouted energetically.

"Now, without mana, against thaids, you will probably die a horrible death, but if you have a bit of luck. With your improved strength, you will be able to at least defend yourself against them if you have a white weapon..."

"Besides, there could be powers better suited to be used in conjunction with weapons," the teacher said while walking up and down the room.

"Now, before we begin, I want you all to introduce yourselves. Let's hear it. Tell us your names, what type of power you can control, and any other information relevant to your abilities or talents," the old man requested.

A girl named Maria raised her hand. She wore long blonde hair tied into two ponytails and looked pretty. Her skin was pale, and her blue eyes shined brightly in the sunlight coming through windows on either side of the room.

"Hello! I'm Maria, and I can..."

Chapter 139: Master Nieminen

"Hello, I'm Ken, and I can turn into a beast!"

"Hello, I'm..."

"Hello!"

"Hello!"

As the people one by one introduced themselves, Erik listened to their introduction with interest once his turn came.

"I'm Erik. I actually have two powers. The first allows me to make plants grow faster and stronger, the second to sharpen everything I want."

Master Rook looked at Erik with an interested look on his face. "So, you are the rumored awakener, am I right?"

"I am..."

"Well, do not think that I will treat you better than the others just because you are an awakener. You may have two powers, but in the end, you are just but a fledgling who doesn't know how the world works." Master Rook said.

"I don't want preferential treatment, sir," Erik replied.

"Good then..."

Then it was Benedict's turn to speak.

"Hello, I'm Benedict. I can summon a halberd!"

<Ah, that solves the mystery...> Erik thought. He never asked his roommate what his power was, but he was curious about it.

"Ah, then you are a lucky one. The guy who teaches the halberd is a great fighter. I bet you will learn a lot from him," Master Rook said, and Benedict nodded energetically.

After that, the other masters arrived inside the room.

"Welcome, guys!" Master Rook said to the newcomers.

At least a hundred teachers arrived inside the room, each and everyone specializing in some fighting style or weapons. There was even the burly man who tested the new students the previous day. They were all wearing golden uniforms, contrasting with the students' uniforms.

The teachers began to introduce themselves. Since he read about them on the computer, many names sounded familiar to Erik. Others, however, were utterly unknown to him. They were all weapons masters, and most of those present were famous fighters known throughout the nation. It appeared that the burly man was the halberd weapon master and that his name was Maximilian Walker.

The students finished their introduction, and after that, Master Rook asked all of them to show them their powers. It was easy to do for the weapon-conjuring students, but for people like Floyd or Amber, it wasn't.

Floyd had to actually ask one of the teachers to run toward him, and he used his power to stop him from doing so. While the second one released a little of her corrosive gasses, trying not to harm the others. Clearly, Anderson had to explain his power rather than show it; while Nathaniel left the people flabbergasted.

As the students showed their powers, they also showed their martial arts to the teachers. They also told them their weapon preference, and the teacher took notes. After all the students were done, the masters went out of the room to talk. After more than half an hour, they finally returned with their test results.

"Okay, let us get down to business. Everyone has different abilities; some are well suited to be used with weapons, while others are not. Regardless, we will still say what we believe will be the best-suited weapon for you. You have no say in the matter!"

One by one, the students got told what they had to learn. Benedict obviously had to learn how to use a halberd; Floyd was apparently well-suited for the spear.

Gwen was assigned the war hammer, which complimented her armor and her strength well. At the same time, Erik got the Flyssa, a type of sword, precisely as the burly man suggested the previous day.

For Amber, it was a little bit different. She was the most balanced out there among the students, as she was good in martial arts, had a power that stopped people from engaging melee, and only missed something that would allow her to fight long-ranged.

A ranged weapon would have been the best choice for the young woman, but since she couldn't imbue mana into the arrows, and since guns and laser weapons became useless against high leveled thaids, the Masters decided that the best thing she could do was to increase her melee strength.

The goal of the Red Palace was to give the students the means to defend themselves without mana. Since they were bound to learn to shoot once they were in the military, she got daggers assigned to her to take advantage of her small build and agility.

However, For Nathaniel and Anderson, the choice had been hard, mainly because the two were very gifted fighters, and whatever they chose for them would have been good. In the end, Anderson got the Claymore since he had a very huge build, while Nathaniel got the trident.

"All right guys, the ones who got assigned to the halberd must go with Master Walker, the ones who got assigned to..." Master Rook told who the students had to follow. Erik was assigned to Master Doris Nieminen, the Flyssa teacher.

Actually, the young man was the only one who got this weapon, so he was the only student in Master Nieminen's class. That wasn't that bad since it meant she could entirely focus on him.

"Well, let's go, guys!" A teacher said.

"Let's go!" Another one shouted.

One by one, the masters and their students went to other rooms, and as they did, Master Nieminen approached Erik, "Follow me," she said.

The young man did as instructed, and they went into an adjacent room. The place had several dummies set up, and next to those was a chair where the woman sat.

The room was not that big, but some mirrors covered the walls. It seemed like the whole wall was a giant mirror, giving the illusion that the space was more extensive than it actually was. Erik saw himself reflected in the glass.

Master Nieminen introduced herself: "Hi, my name is Doris, and I'll teach you how to wield a sword called flyssa."

The woman was short, with brown eyes and long raven hair that she wore in dreadlocks. Her skin was dark chocolate, and her figure was thin, but she appeared to be somewhat muscular. She also had tattoos running along her right shoulder, which could be seen since she wore a sleeveless jacket and some leather pants. She didn't look much older than forty years old, though.

After introductions, she started explaining things about the weapon. She looked at the student, and after having observed him for a bit, she asked, "Do you know what a flyssa is?"

"No, sir," Erik replied.

"Well, the flyssa is a type of sword; the blade varies in length between 30 to 90 centimeters, making them suitable to be considered from long knives to swords. Flyssas always have thin blades and straight-backed edges, regardless of the weapon's size. This guardless weapon is well suited for stabbing but also good at slashing. Do you know why we have selected this sword for you?"

"No, sir, why?" Erik asked.

"Because, with your power and the blade length, you can maximize the damage, and it is light enough to be used with fast moves," Master Nieminen said.

"Ah, I get it."

The Master then showed the young man the weapon. It had a red grip whose pommel represented a falcon, while the blade was straight and at least a meter long with engravings on both sides. The blade was sharpened only by one side and broadened near a pointy tip.

It was a magnificent weapon, and he quite liked it. He couldn't wait to use it! But first...he needed to learn how to wield it, especially using his powers.

"Since we have many things to do and I don't want to waste time, let's head back to the Red Palace to pick your personal weapon. After that, we can start practicing..."

"What am I going to learn today?" Erik asked.

"Just some basic things, like thrusting and slashing, stances, and the like. When you are ready, I will teach you a sword style specifically thought for the Flyssa."

#### Chapter 140: First Sword

While Erik went with Master Nieminen to the Red Palace, Anderson, Amber, and Nathaniel remained behind with Master Rook.

"So, you are the kids who got the first three positions in the school tournament, right?"

"Yes," the three replied in unison. "Good, if this is the case, did you already choose a teacher?"

"Yes, sir," the three replied.

"Let me hear then..." Master Rook said.

"I would like to train with Master Logan Hilton," Nathaniel said.

"I want to train with Master Ajay Bell," Amber said.

"For me, it would be Master Jane Larsen!" Anderson added.

These were three Masters currently teaching the emperor-ranked students; they had all been in the army for many years and achieved a lot during that time. They were the best of the best in their respective fields.

"All right, these teachers are currently busy with high-ranked students, so it will take time before we arrange a schedule. I suggest you go now since the masters you got assigned will take you to get your weapon," Master Rook said.

"Yes, sir," The three said in unison.

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At the same time, Erik and Master Nieminen were leaving the Yellow Palace, their current building, and headed back to the Red one. They took Master Nieminen's car and quickly arrived back at the vast building.

"Where are we going?" Erik asked.

Master Nieminen looked at Erik and answered, "We are going to your floor's armory," Master Nieminen said without looking at the young man.

Erik then recalled what Benedict had told him the previous day. Apparently, each student was bound to get a weapon, and they even had the possibility to customize it.

The armory was simple, with many holographic screens from which each student could interact and create their weapon.

"We must hurry, the other teachers will come here to make their students take their weapons, and once they do, there will be a mess there." Erik nodded.

They entered the main hall through the Red Palace's main gate. The place was mostly deserted since most students already went to the yellow palace to train, giving the place a gloomy look. The duo quickly took the elevator and arrived on the first floor. Once there, they walked through the corridors until they finally reached the room where the armory was located.

Once there, the guard immediately asked the teacher to show an ID, which she promptly did, and then they entered the room.

"You can come here to see the weapons and the various options, but only with a teacher you can build it." Master Nieminen said.

"Let's go!" Master Nieminen exclaimed as the door opened. Once inside, she quickly went to one of the terminals, and Erik followed suit. The woman turned the device on, and a list of weapons appeared. Master Nieminen quickly went to the sword section, then to the Flyssa. Then a series of options appeared in front of them.

He had already looked at what he could do there the previous day, but the sheer number of options was so great that he was amazed again.

"Wow! There are so many choices!" The awakener exclaimed, looking at the screen.

"We must be fast, Erik, so do not waste time!" the woman said.

Erik trusted his teacher regarding the weapon's dimensions and weight. He concluded it was better to only choose the aesthetic parts. Master Nieminen decided that the blade had to be 90 centimeters long with an overall length of a meter and fifteen centimeters by considering the pommel and the handle. It also weighed 0.9 kilograms.

Clearly, the blade had all the characteristics of a Flyssa. It was a single-edged blade that narrowed below the hilt and widened to a needlepoint. This allowed the user to both slash and thrust.

As for the materials, the peasant students could only choose steel as the primary metal, which itself had a rather good mana conductivity. However, at the squire level, one could also choose to use different alloys than steel.

Still, most people chose to use Eshalt, a type of high mana conductive ore that decreased the amount of mana needed to use the power. Of course, it worked for those powers which allowed to imbue items with mana.

Of course, the students who could summon mana weapons mostly used these weapons to train or brought them in case their mana ended. Since, with their improved strength, they could damage thaids regardless of their mana defenses, it was good to bring another weapon.

However, for people like Erik, which had imbuing-like powers, the weapon choice was crucial since the materials could decrease the amount of mana needed.

The hilt was made of steel and was covered by wood for a more comfortable grip. As for the Pommel, Erik decided to represent a dragon's head. Clearly, there was no guard. The young man decided to paint the grip red and the blade black, giving it some laser engravings depicting runic symbols.

"Ok. Now that we have selected the weapon, we need to wait for it to be ready," the teacher said.

"Wouldn't this take a lot of time?" Erik asked. He had watched many videos where blacksmiths forged such weapons, and it usually took a lot of time, even months, to do that.

"Most of the blade has already been forged. We only missed the pommel, which will be made with modern tools, and the painting. It won't take longer than ten minutes to have the sword," the teacher said while looking at the young man.

Afterward, they went to a small podium in the middle of the room and waited there. After ten minutes, the sword came out of the machine and was placed on a pedestal.

"Take it," Master Nieminen said. Erik did so and grabbed the blade by the grip. "How is it?" Master Nieminen asked.

Since Erik had superhuman strength, he didn't have particular problems raising the sword and tried to swing it. However, his clumsiness almost made him injure his master.

"Easy, easy! You could take an eye out of someone..." the woman said.

"Sorry!" Erik said with an apologetic look.

"Let's go back to the yellow palace. I will teach you the basics there," Master Nieminen said. As they left the room, the other teachers came to the armory to let their students make their weapons.

Since there were many people, the teacher tampered a little with the holographic screens making it so that, at least for whatever concerned dimension, length, and materials, they could only choose what the masters decided.

Later, Erik and Master Nieminen arrived at the yellow palace and returned to the room they previously were in.

"All right, young man, I want you to start by swinging your blade this way. I will show you..."

The teacher then went into stance and swung her sword vertically from up to down. She repeated the motion several times until the boy understood how to perform the movements correctly.

Clearly, since Erik increased his dexterity a lot, it wasn't that hard to learn how to perform the move correctly. Besides, since he increased his intelligence, understanding things became easier.

"Very well done," the master said once Erik performed the move the first time.

As soon as he heard those words, the young man raised the sword and moved his arms accordingly again.

"That's correct, very nice," Master Nieminen complimented him.

Erik then looked at her teacher and immediately asked.

"Master, what is the fighting style you will teach me?"

"Good question. It is called Crypt of the Desert style. I developed it myself."

"Cool name. You came up with it?" Erik asked.

"I did. Glad you like it. Many people told me it's lame..." the Master said while looking at her student with a sad look.