

## BIOLOGICAL 54

Chapter 54: New Powers...

"HOLY SHIT!"

Erik's astonishment was unmistakable. "Conal had an A-ranked brain crystal power?! WHAT?! HOW?!"

This revelation stunned him for several reasons. The first being that it was baffling why Conal followed Logan when his own power outranked the latter.

"The system says the power grants the ability to shapeshift into 'Creatures'—that could mean humans, but even... Thaid's."

Perhaps what pushed Conal to follow Logan stemmed from his insecurity, given by his modest amount of mana, not that much different from Erik's. While their mana levels weren't enough to grant high status, Conal's shapeshifting ability, even if temporary, provided a notable edge in most situations. It offered the potential for wings to fly, or gills for underwater breathing.

Yet, Conal's wasn't the only remarkable power Erik had gained. Both Logan's and Orson's abilities held promise. Orson's power, for instance, could enable him to create hidden weapons, perfect for stealth attacks without leaving evidence. There was also the possibility of forming bone armor, but Erik needed to experiment to confirm this.

Logan's ability, instead, opened up a different realm of possibilities. It allowed for long-range attacks with weapons that vanished post-use. While Erik had no intention of mindless killing, he recognized the strategic advantage in a pinch.

Since he had been on the receiving end of this power, he understood its potential to debilitate opponents, offering an edge in dangerous encounters or against thaid's of higher power.

"Let's try these bad boys out..."

Erik tested Logan's power first. As he channeled mana, he felt it course from his brain crystal to his brain and then throughout his body. Instinctively, he knew how to form a poisonous mana dart and set about doing so.

He focused on the accumulated mana in the palm of his hand. It condensed, taking shape into a needle-like object about ten centimeters long, shimmering in a metallic gleam with a faint greenish-blue hue in the light.

Erik closed his hand to grab the dart. Then hurled it towards the wall, aiming for a specific spot.

Thanks to his increased dexterity, his coordination hand-eye improved, and he got the hit with no particular problem, though he acknowledged he was no sniper. The experiment also revealed the dart's high penetration power, ideal for piercing flesh. Yet, Erik pondered its effectiveness against Thaid's with high defenses.

"It doesn't even consume that much mana if I don't overdo on the toxicity..."

Erik could see how Logan had been able to pierce the Lomalins' exoskeletons. The creatures didn't have that much mana, after all, and couldn't produce a very hard defense. Then the dart he threw disappeared as the mana that composed it dissipated.

<I wonder... >

Erik had an idea. For this reason, he summoned another dart and decided to apply his sharpening power to it, aiming to augment its piercing capability by refining the tip.

As the dart appeared in his hands, Erik started channeling mana into the object. A mana coating enveloped its tip, honing it to a finer point.

Erik threw the enhanced dart at the wall, and this time, it penetrated much deeper, embedding itself firmly.

"Wow, I can combine multiple powers!" He almost jumped in joy like a little kid, but regained his composure. "This is great news!"

Erik next experimented with Orson's ability, a power that was both familiar and distinct compared to his other ones. He focused, causing several spiky bones to extend from his arm, emulating Orson's technique used in the battle against the Lomalins. His next attempt involved forming bone armor plating.

<Weapons: Check. Armor: Check. Now Conal's... >

[WARNING: SHAPESHIFTING IS CURRENTLY LIMITED TO LION MORPHS THANKS TO PRE-EXISTING DNA. NO FURTHER DNA FOUND.]

"Really? I knew there were limitations, given its DNA absorption-based, but I didn't expect immediate shapeshifting capabilities. I guess what the system meant about the full absorption of Conal's power referred to the ability to get the additional DNA."

Erik then focused on transforming his hand, morphing it into that of a lion.

"HOLY FU..."

He was struck by a sudden wave of exhaustion and the feeling of being drained of his already meagre amount of mana. The amount required for Conal's power was far greater than he had expected. "Isn't this supposed to be an A-ranked power? Why the massive mana consumption?"

Though, despite everything, Erik felt confident that over time, he could enhance these abilities, particularly Conal's, by increasing the number of neural links. The potential strength these powers could reach intrigued him.

Mana moved much more freely inside his body as he got these three additional neural links. His brain crystal seemed to channel a greater volume of raw mana more efficiently, a fact corroborated by the system's feedback.

However, the first neural link didn't increase his overall stats. Rather than altering his DNA from this point of view, it seemed to adjust his physiology to accommodate the use of the new power.

He then glanced at his watch amidst testing his newfound abilities, Erik realized he was almost late for school. The rest he had taken during the power absorption process had rejuvenated his mind, leaving him in high spirits.

He headed to the kitchen to complete his first daily quest with a hearty breakfast.

The familiar notification popped up in his field of vision, but Erik paid it no mind as he got dressed. Soon after, he left his house and made his way to school.

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The school environment was its usual self. Students hurried out of their cars, all dressed in identical uniforms and clutching tablets loaded with textbooks under their arms.

As Erik approached the entrance, weaving through the main gate where groups of students gathered, chatting and waiting for friends, he noticed the absence of any teachers. Right as he passed through, the bell chimed, signaling the start of classes.

Curiously, Amber, Gwen, and Floyd were not at the gate to meet him, a recent habit they had formed.

<That's odd... > Erik pondered. Despite his somewhat odd behavior the day before, he didn't believe he had given them any reason to avoid him.

On his way to class, Erik walked past Principal Harris' office. The door was ajar, allowing him a glimpse inside. Inside, six individuals wore expressions of concern and alarm. Intrigued, he instructed the system to search the school's database for their identities, though he had a strong suspicion already.

[IDENTIFIED: CONAL'S, LOGAN'S, AND ORSON'S PARENTS.]

<Right. I remembered seeing Conal's father once. > His glance was brief, but he noted striking resemblances between Conal, Orson, Logan, and their parents. Conal shared his father's upturned nose, small with an upward tip, along with his mother's green eyes. Orson seemed to inherit his father's imposing stature and his mother's oval-shaped face.

Though he hadn't seen the other parents before, the familial similarities were remarkable. It was clear who they were to anyone who observed.

<They must be looking for their sons. >

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"Are you sure they were last seen here at school? Mister Harris?" inquired Logan's father, his voice laden with concern.

"Yes, absolutely. Their teacher confirmed they were in class until the last bell. They left with their peers, heading towards the exit, but then, rather suddenly, they left," Principal Harris said.

"There has to be someone who saw them after class!" Orson's mother's voice shook with emotion, her body trembling .

"We're doing everything in our power to help the police find them, Miss Smyth," Principal Harris assured her. "We'll find them. I promise."

The concerned group exited the room, escorted by two police officers.

Following the students' disappearance, Principal Harris had contacted the police for help. Given the city's escalating crime rates, particularly kidnappings, the police had expanded their ranks with private investigators and recently discharged military personnel.

Though reluctant to involve the authorities, fearing negative publicity for his school, Principal Harris recognized the gravity of the situation and acted accordingly. He had instructed the school community to remain silent about the missing students to prevent widespread panic inside the city and avoid poor advertisement.

Logan and his friends had a notorious reputation at school. Their notoriety stemmed not just from the public confrontation with Erik in the cafeteria, but also because of the bathroom incident and many tales of their bullying of lower-ranked students.

While these stories were rumors only among teachers, but the student body was all too aware of their actions.

Yet, considering their sudden disappearance, none of these past transgressions seemed relevant. It was plausible to pin their disappearance on the Crystal Cross Gang, known for their frequent kidnappings.

Erik realized, despite his thoughts, that the police was going to ask him questions sooner or later. A brief investigation would uncover their history of bullying and the notorious cafeteria incident, raising suspicions.

However, Erik was confident there was no concrete evidence linking him to their disappearance. The message Logan received through the system had vanished after reading, and he had been cautious about concealing his actions outside the school. No one saw him don the mask. He made sure about it.

Besides, his recent awakening status theoretically implied they should have left him alone—after all, why would an awakener harm two lower-ranked students? That was at least what most of the people did in other situations. But he also knew that other bullied students, like himself, might come under scrutiny.

<Hopefully, they'll focus on the Crystal Cross Gang theory. >

Minutes after the departure of the police and the parents, Erik entered his classroom. He meticulously reviewed his actions from the previous day, ensuring he had made no slip-ups.

Though confident it was impossible for them to find the three boy's bodies outside of the barrier, he felt safe. Yet, unbeknownst to him, there was a minor oversight in his actions that might lead someone to unravel everything.

<I really hope thaid's got rid of the three pricks' bodies... > Erik thought, clinging to that slim chance.