

BIOLOGICAL 65

Chapter 65: A week later

Eight days had passed since Erik unlocked the Lomalin's power. During this period, he also fully accessed Conal's power, enabling him to absorb new DNA and shapeshift.

Aside from these developments, the days were uneventful. Yet, with a new neural link development technique in progress, Erik felt a growing sense of anticipation for what was to come.

Meanwhile, the local police were deep into the investigation of Logan's, Conal's, and Orson's mysterious disappearances. All leads pointed towards a tragic end at the hands of a criminal gang - a scenario not uncommon in their area. The possibility that the young men had resisted a robbery, leading to their deaths, was a theory under consideration among the many.

Strangely, their bodies remained undiscovered, deviating from the usual patterns of such crimes. This lack of evidence left the police baffled, with no substantial clues to guide their investigation.

The families of the missing men clung to hope, but as days passed without a ransom demand, a hallmark of kidnapping cases, this hope dwindled.

Another grim possibility loomed: the young men might have fallen victim to organ harvesting, a heinous crime that had become disturbingly frequent.

Rumors swirled about the high demand for organs, fueled by the ongoing war and other unknown factors. Many victims simply vanished, leaving no trace of whether they were alive or had been exploited for their organs.

Amidst this uncertainty, the six distraught parents sought answers, navigating a maze of possibilities and fears.

Erik, for his part, continued his routine. He completed his daily quests, worked on Mister Fox's farm, and trained with Professor McAllister and other top students.

His enhanced attributes made these tasks more manageable than before. Yet integrating sword training into his already packed schedule proved challenging.

His efforts bore fruit, though, as he eliminated ten more Lomalins, resulting in another level up. This advancement boosted his energy to 27. He also made another neural link to his sharpening power. The increase in physical statistics was a welcome bonus. Erik also completed his first weekly quest, earning a strength point. Progress was steady and promising.

However, thinking back at his fights in the forest, one peculiar observation nagged at Erik: in all his forays into the surrounding forest, he encountered only Lomalins. The absence of other thaids in the area was an anomaly that piqued his curiosity.

Erik's curiosity about thaids led him to uncover startling facts. He learned that Lomalins, while not the strongest thaids, were formidable because of their communal behavior. They often dispatched small scouting groups for food and resources before larger swarms followed to secure these finds.

Erik realized he had encountered only minor groups, typically comprising 5-6 Lomalins. However, it was more common for these creatures to attack in massive groups, sometimes exceeding a hundred individuals. This revelation sent a shiver down his spine.

Erik realized how naïve he had been and to better prepare for future encounters, he asked the system to inject information about thaids around the world. He didn't know where his life would bring him, but he knew it was not here in Frant.

Having such information could save him a lot of trouble. It would not only enhance his combat readiness but also inform him about the various brain crystal powers these creatures possessed.

Meanwhile, the world buzzed with news about brain crystal weapons. This groundbreaking technology sparked global speculation about the possibility of reclaiming the Mur continent, a land overrun by thaids. The idea of exploring this uncharted territory intrigued many, Erik included.

Yet, the risks were enormous. The demise of Solomon Judd, the strongest man known in human history, served as a grim reminder of the dangers that loomed that continent. Erik knew he needed to become stronger before even considering such an expedition.

The topic of brain crystal weapons dominated TV and media for a week, stirring heated discussions at school. Students debated the mechanics of these weapons - whether they used the user's mana or relied on the residual power in the brain crystals embedded in the equipment.

Erik, though curious, had to wait for the technology to become publicly accessible to understand its workings. He doubted Etrium would readily share this knowledge, given its potential to establish them as the dominant power on the continent.

Amid these developments, Erik noticed a shift in his school environment. Since Logan's disappearance, there was a noticeable calm.

His newfound ability to defend himself deterred any potential bullies. His training with the school's elite students drew admiration, showcasing his remarkable progress from a novice in martial arts to a somewhat acceptable fighter.

For the other students, he was much stronger, as few did really want to enlist and trained before that happened.

His brain crystal power might not have been as powerful as his peers', but Erik's physical attributes compensated for this, making him abnormally strong for his age and level of neural links.

This combination of skill and strength changed the dynamics of his interactions at school, earning him a newfound respect among his peers.

Erik had just wrapped up his work at the farm when a message from Amber popped up on his phone.

[Get to school quickly. Professor McAllister's about to make a big announcement. DON'T BE LATE. - AMBER JOYCE.]

<What could this announcement be about? >

By hastening his steps, Erik made his way to the train station. Once aboard, he chose his usual spot near the window.

The train journey transitioned from rural landscapes, with fields and forests, to the urban sprawl of New Alexandria. Skyscrapers and buildings thickened as the train neared downtown, bustling with activity.

Upon reaching his stop, Erik disembarked and headed towards the school. The trip took about 15 minutes. As he approached the school, Erik saw a crowd gathered around the electronic information board.

Professor McAllister was there, flanked by the school's top students, standing solemn but silent amidst the buzz of anticipation.

Erik's entrance drew Professor McAllister's sharp gaze, an action that didn't go unnoticed. Whispers and snickers spread among the students, many of whom still harbored a dislike for Erik.

He spotted Amber, who motioned for him to join the line. Erik positioned himself to her left. He scanned the surrounding faces. These were students who stayed back for extra training, familiar from his visits to the gym, a privilege reserved for the elite.

This group was a mix of exceptional talents, enviable physiques, and academic achievers. Everyone's attention was fixed on Professor McAllister, waiting for the momentous announcement. A hush fell over the crowd as the last of the top students arrived.

Professor McAllister, seizing the moment, spoke, starting his address just as Erik settled beside Amber.

"As you know," Professor McAllister's voice, steady and commanding, captured the attention of every student gathered. He paced in front of the crowd, his hands clasped behind his back, embodying the gravitas of his position.

"Every year, the school's top students are sent to the Red Palace before their military enrollment." He stopped pacing, emphasizing the importance of his next words. "This is a privilege exclusive to students from New Alexandria, as the Red Palace is unparalleled in our nation." He gestured, illustrating the grandeur and prestige of the institution.

He then resumed his slow, deliberate pacing, his expression serious. "It's easy to imagine, then," he said, turning to face the students, "the honor that comes with being selected for the Red Palace." His eyes scanned the crowd, ensuring his message resonated with every student present.

Professor McAllister's voice took on a more inclusive tone, leaning forward to engage with his audience. "Usually, the top students get selected by the school." His hands unfolded to gesture towards the students.

"This often means many gifted, yet not as fortunate, individuals miss out." His voice then lifted with a hint of excitement, signaling a shift in the announcement. "This time, however, we have some special news..."

The surrounding students whispered among themselves, a wave of curiosity rippling through the crowd. Professor McAllister waited a moment, allowing the murmurs to swell before raising his hand, commanding silence.

He resumed with a firmer, decisive tone, "From this year onwards, we're opening doors to all our students." He emphasized 'all,' making eye contact with various students, ensuring his message of inclusivity was clear.

"We're organizing a tournament at the end of this school year." His eyes sparkling with the significance of this new opportunity.

"It will begin on the first of July, right here in the school's gym. Every student is invited to take part," he said, nodding, his expression a blend of seriousness and encouragement.

Murmurs filled the air as students huddled in groups, each trying to unravel the reason behind this unprecedented decision.

Some speculated that this might be an innovative approach to identify the crème de la crème for the Red Palace, perhaps a novel method to gauge their skills better.

However, a few harbored suspicions of favoritism, considering Erik's recent inclusion in the training sessions with the top students.

His progress since awakening his powers was no secret, yet to a lot of them, it seemed implausible that he'd be chosen directly by the school for the Red Palace.

They conjectured this tournament might be a setup to pave his way into the elite group.

But beyond these speculations, the announcement presented an extraordinary chance for every student. It was a golden opportunity to gain entry into the esteemed dojo, an opportunity they were determined not to squander.

