

## BIOLOGICAL 67

Chapter 67: The consequences of his actions

As Erik strode toward the train station on his way home, an unexpected ringtone pierced the air. It was unusual for his phone to ring, stirring a sense of curiosity in him who could it could be.

However, when the system showed him his phone's screen, he was taken aback to see Uncle Benjamin's contact.

A flicker of wariness crossed his face as he hesitated before accepting the call. The connection between his phone and the biological supercomputer meant Benjamin's voice resonated in his ears, bypassing the need for a traditional conversation.

"Erik," Benjamin's voice came through, tinged with a mix of annoyance and cheerfulness.

"Uncle Ben," Erik said, his voice measured, maintaining a guarded tone.

"You didn't mention your awakening the last time we met!" The older man was a little bit hurt by the fact he didn't share that news with him.

That was right. Erik didn't want to tell that to him. He still had many suspicions about the man and telling him this information could be problematic.

"Apologies, Uncle Ben. It slipped my mind," Erik said, his voice flat, masking the emotional turbulence he was currently having.

Sensing Erik's guarded response, Benjamin asked. "Is something wrong?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"It is from a while that I've noticed you are a little bit weird," Benjamin said.

<Fuck... I should be more careful. >

"Not at all. It's just that I'm tired," Erik said.

"All right," Then Benjamin shifted the conversation to a lighter topic. "I'm coming to pick you up. We'll go to our favorite restaurant to celebrate your awakening. How does that sound?" His voice was more enthusiastic now.

"Really?" Erik said, his tone remaining cautious yet polite. He didn't really want to go. He had the money to do so alone now, but rejecting the offer may sound weird, since he always accepted such offers from Uncle Benjamin.

"Absolutely," Benjamin said. "Where are you now?"

Erik thought about it for some time, wondering if that was a good idea. He couldn't skip training his neural links, so he was going to be forced to do so late in the night.

Luckily, his training at school and the breakfast he had that morning already gave him the DNA points for that day.<sup>1</sup>

Meeting uncle Benjamin could be his chance to hack his phone and get some of the information he sought to gain. So, he agreed.

"At the western train station. I'll wait here," Erik said, still maintaining his composed demeanor.

Within ten minutes, a car pulled up beside him. Benjamin emerged, immaculately dressed in a black and white suit that hinted at something expensive.

"Hi Uncle Ben!" Erik said, faking happiness.

They exchanged a brief hug before walking to the car, but Erik always remained, at least emotionally detached. He did his best to make it seem to Uncle Benjamin that nothing was wrong.

Throughout the drive, Erik narrated his awakening, discussing his newfound friendships and experiences with a carefully measured distance hidden between fake smiles.

However, he remained alert, careful not to reveal too much to the older man. As soon as they got to the restaurant, he was going to hack the man's phone.

Though, the middle-aged man radiated happiness for Erik. He was aware of the struggles his friend's son had endured because of a weaker brain crystal. Therefore, Erik's awakening appeared nothing short of a miracle from his perspective.

Erik feigned excitement as he recounted his experience. "They brought me into this grand testing chamber to evaluate my powers. It came out my brain crystal only got a slight improvement, but I jumped to the E rank! That's better than nothing, right?"

Benjamin's eyes lit up with joy. "Yeah! Absolutely! I'm very happy for you, Erik. So, what are you planning to do now?" The man asked.

Erik, masking his true intentions, responded with a rehearsed cheerfulness. "Oh, after my military ten year service, I'm considering buying some land to start my own farm. Seems like the best use of my abilities." He his eyes darted between Benjamin and the car.

Benjamin shifted uncomfortably in his seat, his tone serious. "It will not be simple. To get a farm, join hands with the stone family."

He paused, his brow furrowing. "And that is not as easy as it seems. They are very conservative, and they do not trust people easily. You are also of Richard Stone's daughter's age."

Benjamin shook his head, a hint of warning in his voice. "If he suspects you harbor ulterior motives with her, or plan something behind their back, you are a dead man."

He leaned back, his expression turning more somber. "There's another problem. You know, I'm an army major, so I understand the military's ways better than most."

"Believe me when I say it won't be easy to escape their clutches, especially since you are an awakener..." Benjamin said.

Erik's gaze hardened, reflecting his resolve. "So, what do you think they will do, prevent me from leaving them after the ten-year mandatory service?"

Benjamin met his nephew's eyes, his expression stern. "That's exactly what I think will happen, Erik. With double the neural links, you're twice as strong as the average soldier. They will concoct

various excuses to keep you enlisted. Working you to the bone to speed up the neural link making process. Of that, you can be certain."1

Erik's jaw set, a glint of rage in his eyes. "I know that, but I don't plan to stay in the military forever," he said.

Uncle Benjamin's voice was laced with seriousness and a tinge of worry. "I don't think you have any choice in the matter," he said, his brows furrowing.

He paused for a moment, letting the weight of his words sink in before continuing. "If you find a way to leave the military after the ten-year service, they will make your life miserable for having abandoned them." The concern in his eyes was clear as he spoke about the military's reach.

"They control everything inside the country," he said, his voice lowering, as if sharing a grave secret. "And your only way out of their control would be to become a thug." He sighed. "I don't think you will enjoy a life of robbery and murder."

Erik's frustration was palpable. "Fuck!" He hadn't expected this predicament. Aware of the scarcity of Awakeners in the military and considering the last one perished four decades ago, before Becker's rise to power in Frant, Erik had assumed his service would be the standard of ten years. The prospect of a lifetime under military control was a daunting and unforeseen complication.

"I don't think you will be able to have a normal life anymore, Erik," Uncle Benjamin said, his tone reflecting the gravity of the situation. "You are underestimating the power an Awakener possesses..."

Erik's expression turned contemplative. "So, my only option is to run away?" he asked.

"That's what I think..." Benjamin said.

Erik's situation had become complex. Facing a future where he might be a fugitive or remain bound to military service, neither path appealed to him. Yet, he was at a loss for alternatives, his choices constrained.

As they reached the restaurant, Erik asked the biological supercomputer to access Uncle Benjamin's phone.

The search, conducted, yielded little of interest. The only notable discovery was Benjamin's frequent post-work meetings with a woman, as evidenced by the text messages.

This detail, however inconsequential it might have seemed, was the only deviation from the ordinary in Benjamin's communications. He was a soldier. It was unlikely everything important was kept on a phone.

Some of the text detailed them meeting frequently after work. Glad he found nothing. The two had dinner peacefully. Then the older man brought the kid back home. While Erik got out of the car, Uncle Benjamin observed Erik better. He was surprised to see Erik's new build.

At the hospital, he didn't notice, but he changed a lot.

Gone was the chubby frame he got for his lack of physical activity and his frequent eating of junk food, among the cheapest food he could afford.

That was replaced by a well-built physique that radiated both health and appeal.

These physical changes, courtesy of the system, didn't escape Erik's gratitude, either. Of course, Uncle Benjamin didn't know that.

Once he was inside, Erik went to wash himself. The young man observed his reflection in the mirror and had similar thoughts to Benjamin.

He, too, was contemplating his physical form. Yet, as he did, Erik mulled over the implications of revealing himself as an awakener to society.

He had grown weary of being marginalized, weary of being perceived as worthless. Yet, revealing his awakening, albeit a facade, placed him in a precarious situation. Life as he had known it was irrevocably altered.

The prospect of joining the military didn't disturb him. In a world besieged by thaids and human treachery alike, strength was more a necessity than a choice. He knew that military training would fortify him against exploitation. That was why he was still willing to join the military before Uncle Benjamin told him that.

However, his distaste for Frant's societal structure and governance was high and learning he would become part of such a structure for the rest of his life didn't sit well with him. As much as being controlled by other people.

The city was a mess. The rampant crime, the pervasive sense of danger - it was a daily gamble of life and death.

His luck had spared him from robbery, murder, or abduction for organ trafficking thus far, but he knew his luck could run out at any moment.

Erik saw only some paths to salvation: either amassing enough strength to seek refuge in a different nation or witnessing a transformation within Frant itself.

However, his best chance at that moment was the Red Palace. If he got there, he could become stronger, but he could also gain connections. If he played things well, he may be able to persuade someone important enough to change his fate.

Besides hoping on the downfall of General Becker, was a notion almost absurd as things were progressing. Becker wasn't just powerful; his influence spanned across wealth and control.

In the face of such formidable power, it remained baffling that the government failed to address the nation's myriad problems. It seemed implausible that a regime so dependent on military might would be oblivious to the happenings within its own borders. Yet Erik knew that such a notion was more hopeful than realistic.

<The key lies in playing my cards right. The Red Palace Dojo could be my ticket out of this situation. Perhaps there, I'll gain the strength to break free from this oppressive nation, to choose thajids over people. Ultimately, it all comes down to power. >

With his mind made up, Erik recognized the urgency of securing a place at the Red Palace Dojo. It represented his best chance to amass the resources needed for an escape.

Resolute in his plan, Erik left the bathroom and settled back onto the couch. He attempted to train in neural link formation, but exhaustion from the day's activities weighed on him. After a brief session, sleep beckoned.

He surrendered to its call, quickly succumbing to a deep, undisturbed slumber that lasted till morning.