

## **BIOLOGICAL 69**

### Chapter 69: First Spar (1)

The streets of New Alexandria echoed with chaos that day, filled with the sounds of alarm and panic. A grisly murder had taken place right outside a man's residence, leaving the passerby with uneasiness.

"Is that Tom?"

"Yeah. He had been murdered this morning. Poor man."

"I heard he was in enormous debt. Could this be the reason he was killed?"

"Maybe, or this is simply a mugging attempt ending bad."

A police officer approached the onlookers. "Stand back! This is a crime scene! Stand back!"

According to many, the Crystal Cross Gang was behind the brutal act, having had some undisclosed conflict with the victim. The law enforcement officials, however, remained tight-lipped about the specifics of the dispute.

The victim's residence became the epicenter of morbid curiosity as a large crowd gathered around it, hindering the police's efforts to manage the situation.

"When will you arrest them?!"

"We want to be safe!"

These events were not infrequent inside the city. Becker did his best to avoid them, but the truth was the police was under many criminal gangs' pay book.

The man's body lay just outside his doorstep, shrouded in a white cloth that did little to conceal the horrific nature of his death.

It wasn't clear what exactly killed the man, as his body was a mess and he was severely mangled. It looked like the work of an explosive brain crystal power, but everything could be.

Police had cordoned off the area with barricade tapes, but the onlookers pressed against the barriers, eager to catch a glimpse of the crime scene.

Erik, strolling down the street, came upon this tumultuous scene and couldn't help but wonder what happened.

The crowd piqued his curiosity, so he asked the people nearby who told him about what had happened.

After having approached the perimeter of the crime scene, Erik's gaze fell upon the severed head of the victim, a sight that would disturb most, but it sparked a different reaction in him.

<Fucking scums... Depraved city. >

He observed the body from afar. That was a dangerous neighborhood. Then his eyes landed on the man's brain crystal lying there on the ground.

<What a pity...>

To Erik, it was a resource unclaimed, one that he could use to his advantage. To retrieve and consume the brain crystal lingered in his mind, a thought chilling, but he knew that if he did something like that, he would not differ from the ones that killed the man.

Not that he cared about this guy's death, but despite having killed, out of necessity and desperation, he still wanted to not resort to useless violence. Erik hoped that killing the three bullies was his last murder.

Erik's intense gaze on the dismembered body caught the attention of a passerby, who couldn't help but question the nature of his interest.

"Did you know him?" the man asked, a hint of suspicion in his voice.

"Ah... no. It's just that it is my first time seeing a body."

"Really?" The man was surprised. "In this neighborhood?"

"Yeah..."

"You better get used to it, kid," the man said.

Realizing time was of the essence, Erik left the unsettling scene behind him. He hurried to the train station, making his way to school for an important meeting with Professor McAllister and his fellow students to prepare for the tournament that would be held the following week.

Upon reaching the school's faculty building, Erik found Professor McAllister already deep in conversation with the other top students. They were engrossed in a discussion about the tournament.

"You are late," Amber said.

"Yeah, sorry. A man got killed near my house and I stopped to see..." Erik said.

"Why? Did you know him?"

"No, but I thought it was someone I knew," Erik lied.

"Luckily you didn't," Amber said.

"Yeah..."

Post Professor McAllister's speech, the students launched into their training routines. Erik, with a clear goal in mind, changed into his training attire, eager to enhance his strength and skill.

Each kick, punch, throw, and block was executed with precision and determination under the watchful eye of his instructor.

An hour into the vigorous session, Erik paused for a much-needed break. The familiar notification of a completed quest echoed in his mind, signaling his progress.

[QUEST COMPLETE.]

Though it was still early morning, Erik had already achieved his daily training goals. His muscles throbbed from exerting new moves he hadn't practiced before, a reminder of the journey he still had to undertake to become strong.

Yet, he was undeterred, knowing that only relentless effort and perseverance would build his strength and skill.

After having resumed his training, Erik absorbed every hint, piece of advice, and direction Professor McAllister offered.

The teacher's guidance helped him identify and correct his errors, enhancing his technique.

Erik's heightened dexterity allowed him to execute moves with increased agility and accuracy, a fact that did not escape Professor McAllister's attention.

After observing Erik's progress, the teacher approached him.

"Erik," Professor McAllister said, capturing the young man's attention.

"Yes, sir?"

"I've been watching your progress," the teacher said. "And I believe you're ready for a more challenging phase. Starting today, I want you to engage in sparring sessions."

Erik's rapid improvement had not gone unnoticed. In less than a month, he had accomplished what took other people months to achieve.

The man pondered whether Erik's extraordinary progress was because of innate talent or his usage of stimulating serums. Whatever the reason, the gains in his skills were undeniable.

With Erik's current level of proficiency, the time had come for him to embrace more serious and challenging aspects of his training.

Taking part in the tournament was essential for Erik if he aspired to join the Red Palace. Unbeknownst to Erik, Principal Harris had started the tournament to provide Erik with this opportunity.

This decision was part of a broader effort by the principal to maximize Erik's chances, a fact that remained unknown to both Erik and Professor McAllister.

But that wasn't done with good intentions. The principal wanted to exploit Erik. If he sent him to the Red Palace, he would get honors and money.

The notion of favoritism within the school's system didn't sit well with Professor McAllister. However, he recognized his limited ability to challenge the decisions of Principal Harris, his superior.

"Are you sure, sir?" Erik asked, uncertainty clear in his voice. He didn't fear the fight, but didn't want to embarrass himself, since sparring had to be strictly done using martial arts.

"Yes," the teacher said. He then turned to Amber. Knowing that she and Erik were friends, he believed her involvement would speed up Erik's development. It was a strategic move, and upon hearing the proposal, Amber agreed.

Despite the fear of being embarrassed, training with Amber, more experienced and stronger, presented an opportunity.

He couldn't back down since, if he really improved, he might be able to qualify to join the top students in the Red Palace. Amber was strong, and any insight he could get from her was priceless.

Amber approached Erik with a warm, encouraging smile. She seemed enthusiastic about the prospect of training together.

Amber noticed Erik's apparent nervousness, and she teased, "Don't worry, I won't hurt you!" Aiming to lighten the mood and ease his apprehension.

"Let's hope you keep your word, then!"

"Don't worry, my friend!" Amber said, her voice full of encouragement. "We will have fun!"

Erik faked a smile. Despite fearing embarrassment, he would not refuse that chance. The two went on a sparring mat.

Amber adopted a combat stance, poised and confident. Erik mirrored her, albeit less assuredly. They waited for Professor McAllister's signal, and upon his command, they lunged towards each other.

Erik's movements were tentative. He focused on figuring out Amber's fighting style and anticipate her next moves. As he struggled to read her intentions, Erik's movements became more fluid and rapid, a necessity rather than a choice.

The sparring session evolved into a dynamic exchange of strikes and blocks. While Erik defended against some of Amber's attacks, the disparity in their skill levels was apparent.

Amber's superior experience and technique overshadowed Erik's raw, unrefined prowess, a fact clear to all observers.

Amber exuded confidence in the fight, certain she wouldn't suffer a single hit from Erik, who was still finding his footing in combat.

True to her expectations, Erik launched several attacks, but each time, Amber evaded them.

Despite this, she couldn't help but recognize the strength in Erik's punches. They were swift and appeared to carry significant weight.

While Amber had no trouble sidestepping his blows, she acknowledged that a direct hit would be painful.

Erik's lack of experience was clear about his missed opportunities and unlanded strikes. Amber, in contrast, avoided each attack, her movements smooth and practiced.

From the sidelines, Professor McAllister watched the sparring with intense interest. He liked Erik's raw potential and fighting spirit, envisioning a future where the young man could rise to the ranks of a champion with dedicated training.

For Amber, the joy of combat was unmistakable. She relished the opportunity to spar, enjoying the upper hand against her less experienced opponent, but glad she could help him improve safely.

Eventually, Erik ceased his offensive, recognizing the futility of his current strategy against Amber's superior skill and agility.