

## BIOLOGICAL 73

### Chapter 73: The tournament (1)

Five days passed since Erik's intense training session with Amber. However, that wasn't the end. He dedicated himself to rigorous training, sparring with Amber, Floyd, and Gwen many times. Though, while Floyd and Amber went easy on him, Gwen didn't.

His skills in combat improved a lot because of Amber's exceptional teaching ability. While not yet matching Floyd, Gwen, or Amber in skill, Erik made notable strides, earning praise from his peers. Professor McAllister observed his progress, offering several commendations for Erik's hard work.

While Erik's readiness for the Red Palace remained uncertain, he felt a newfound confidence to at least attempt the challenge. He no longer harbored doubts about performing poorly in the upcoming tournament.

With the tournament's approach, the official rules were announced. The format was straightforward: a single-elimination tournament with 352 students taking part.

Despite being open to all, only a select few possessed the courage to enter. The school set up 176 bouts across the campus, presenting a logistical challenge for the competitors.

Each participant faced a daily match, fighting in randomly assigned training fields around the school campus. Victors advanced to higher brackets, with the entire tournament spanning over 8 days.

On the fifth day, with twenty-two competitors remaining, the venue would shift to a ring, broadcasting the matches on the school's platform. Reaching this stage meant automatic acceptance into the Red Palace, setting Erik's target at winning four bouts of entry.

Eager to showcase his metamorphosis over the past month, Erik committed to performing at his peak in the tournament.

His resolve to excel stemmed not just from the high stakes, but also from the support of his friends. Their encouragement fueled his relentless training, a feat made achievable through the power of the system.

In a classroom surrounded by his peers, Erik reflected on this journey. Today marked the official last day of school but the truth was that to allow the students to train, lessons ended some time before.

However, Erik and the ones who wanted to test their skills inside the tournament, were currently trying to establish another neural link

Erik devoted his attention to forming neural links. As he concentrated, a wave of mana surged through him, creating a buzzing sensation from his brain to his toes. This unique feeling, he knew, was vital for his growth. That day, however, he couldn't establish a new link, missing an opportunity to boost his stats for the tournament.

When the class concluded, Professor O'Leary rose to address his students. "My dear students! Today is your graduation day!" His voice echoed throughout the hall as the students cheered excitedly.

"I want you to know that I'm proud of each one of my students here today." The students applauded.

Once the clapping subsided, O'Leary said. "I know that some of you joined the tournament, so if you want to leave for training, then you are free to do so, but if you wish to stay, then there is going to be a small feast in the cafeteria."

The teacher spoke for a couple of minutes more; he even addressed Erik, telling him he was happy that he could finally get a neural link.

He was unaware that Erik now had 8 of them as he got another one two days earlier, and despite half of them being useless since they didn't improve his statistics. Though Erik was now a  $\sigma^2$  ranked fighter as he got 1 more neural links in his sharpening power two days earlier.

Albeit not being the student with the highest number of neural links or the strongest, he was at least able to defend himself.

The students erupted in cheers, anticipating the feast announced by their teacher. They relished the thought of savoring the meals they'd enjoyed for the past two years, now soon to be memories.

"I want to remind all of you that the tournament will take place today at fifteen, so if you wish to see your friends competing, you better not be late!" the teacher said.

The classroom emptied as students and teachers made their way to the cafeteria. A few, including Erik, lingered behind.

Erik preferred heading to the gym, knowing Floyd, Gwen, and Amber awaited him there. As he strolled through the halls, Erik noted many tournament participants, their faces etched with anxiety.

The announcement had spurred them into a frenzy of training, each seeking the slight edge needed for Red Palace admission.

Though, not every student learned how to fight, preferring to spend their days as peacefully as possible before entering the military, where their training would start.

The ones who joined were those with a little of experience under their belt. Today marked the start of the preliminaries, a daunting day as half the contenders would face elimination, heightening the nerves among the students.

Perhaps they possessed the skills to enter the Red Palace, yet facing someone whose skills were too high for them too soon could dash their hopes.

Upon Erik's arrival at the gym, he found Floyd, Gwen, and Amber already engaged in training. They weren't alone, though, as all the top students were training and sparring among themselves.

Nathaniel, the tournament favorite, was dueling against Karl and Natasha at the same time. Known for his prowess in multiple-opponent fights, Nathaniel had a history of triumph in such challenging duels.

Karl, a towering figure with cascading blonde hair neatly tied in a ponytail, contrasted with Natasha. She was of shorter stature, her black hair styled to let her bangs partially covering her face.

Both Karl and Natasha were skilled fighters, yet Nathaniel remained unbeaten. His martial art ranked third among the top students, trailing Amber and Anderson. However, when using his brain crystal, Nathaniel's ease of use, precision, and power were unmatched.

Even though he was in his prime right now, he still trained hard and kept improving his skills. If anything, Nathaniel was the perfect example of someone who wanted to become stronger, no matter the cost.

Erik speculated Nathaniel would likely clinch the tournament, with Anderson as the probable runner-up. Their prowess was unparalleled within the school's confines.

Anderson's power was more destructive, but its use was restricted in a crowded setting to avoid harming Nathaniel or others, or blow up the school. The problem with Anderson was that he also had a ton of mana, and since he couldn't yet control the power, he was bound to make a mess.

Many knew that, if Anderson had a different ability, he would win. Maybe in a fight to death, he would win, but since this was not a death match, Anderson was severely limited in his fight.

Gathering with Amber, Gwen, and Floyd, Erik geared up for their last training session. A friendly spar was the perfect warm-up to ensure they were in optimal shape for the tournament. However, on the 28th, Erik completed another weekly quest, and he got an additional dexterity point that was going to boost his chances in the tournament and help him train.

[QUEST COMPLETE]

The session marked the conclusion of their preparations. As the competitors awaited the commencement, the bell at fifteen signaled the end of classes. Participants quickly vacated their classrooms, poised for the upcoming challenges.

The draw, determining the matchups, was imminent, setting the stage for the unfolding tournament. However, Erik received two notifications.

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{Monthly Quest: Make two neural links.}

-Completion Rewards: 1 Point in each stat.

-Failure Penalty: Missed Opportunity for Growth.

-Goal: Make two neural links within a month. You are free to choose what neural link to make.

-Description: In a world where power reigns supreme, neural links are the founding step to one's power. Make two additional neural links and prove to everyone how strong you are.

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{Quest: Qualify to join the Red Palace Dojo}

-Completion Rewards: One Level Up.

-Failure Penalty: No rewards.

-Goal: Win four rounds and qualify to join the Red Palace.

-Description: A tremendous opportunity presented itself to you. If you join the Red Palace, you will make connections, train in the best facilities and get stimulating serums. You must not waste this opportunity.

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A smirk appeared on Erik's face. This was a huge opportunity.