

## BIOLOGICAL 77

### Chapter 77: The Tournament (5)

The next morning found Erik waking with a sense of positivity. A restful sleep had mitigated his anxiousness about the upcoming match. Feeling the pangs of hunger from the day before, he got out of bed to prepare breakfast. As part of his routine, Erik turned his attention to his quests.

With a prompt voice, he called out, "SYSTEM. SHOW ME THE QUESTS." In response, a blue and white holographic display materialized before him.

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[Quests List]

{Daily}

<Eating Habits>

-Rewards for completion: Ten Experience, ten DNA points

-Failure Penalty: None

(Eat a healthy meal)

<Physical training>

-Rewards for completion: Ten Experience, ten DNA points

-Failure Penalty: None

(Train for at least an hour. The Host may choose whatever exercise to complete the quest.)

{Weekly}

{Conquer the Training Gauntlet}

-Completion Rewards: 1 Strength Stat Point.

-Failure Penalty: Missed Opportunity for Growth.

-Goal: Complete Daily training quests for a week (4/7).

-Description: Commit to daily quests for a full week. Prove your dedication and resilience. Success grants you increased strength, a testament to your unwavering discipline.

{Monthly}

{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 (0/2).

-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.

{Issued}

{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 (1/4).

-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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After having eaten, the usual notification of having completed a quest rang inside his ears.

[QUEST COMPLETE.]

Erik, having ample time, tackled his second daily quest. After an intense hour of training, he accomplished it. Post-training, he showered, dressed, and set off for school.

The day's matches were scheduled for 15:00, providing Erik ample preparation time. Curious about his peers' training methods and to have better information against strong opponents, he hastened his pace toward the train station.

Upon arriving at school, Erik found the campus silent and empty. However, it wasn't long before students began filtering in through the main entrance.

Many students chose not to train in the gym, preferring to keep their strategies under wraps. This wasn't the case for the top students, who were familiar with each other's skills and had no secrets to guard. They gravitated towards the gym for its superior equipment.

Others practiced around the school campus, some accompanied by friends and family. As Erik walked through the halls, he noticed varying degrees of anxiety among the students. Some appeared visibly stressed or ill, while others moved with a confident stride.

During his stroll, Erik encountered Amber, Gwen, and Floyd.

"Hi, guys!" They smiled back.

"Hey! Good morning!" Floyd said, flashing a thumbs-up.

Gwen acknowledged Erik with a simple nod, her face calm and unreadable.

"Good morning," Amber said. "Did you get enough rest?"

"I slept, but I couldn't stop thinking about today's match. I wonder who I will fight against today..."

"Don't worry, unless it's one of the top 20, you'll be fine," Floyd reassured him with a grin.

"Thank you, but I won't be so sure..."

"You worry too much. Just enjoy the fight." Floyd said.

Their conversation continued for a while, filled with friendly banter. Once they felt prepared, the group engaged in some sparring. Erik had trained that morning, but sparring would help him shake off some of his anxiety and gain more confidence.

They began with a gentle warm-up before transitioning into full-contact sparring. Each one took turns facing the others, honing their skills and experience for the day's matches.

Initially, they sparred cautiously, mindful of the upcoming tournament. No one wanted to risk injury. However, as they warmed up, the intensity increased, particularly for Erik, who was eager to gain as much experience as possible.

Elsewhere, top students like Nathaniel, Anderson, Karl, and Natasha were doing the same. They restrained from using their powers, mindful that healers weren't around yet. Still, they engaged in vigorous sparring, each preparing for their own battles ahead.

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As the day progressed and the matches' start time approached, Professor McAllister gathered the 176 students who had advanced from the previous round. They assembled in front of the main gate, where a makeshift podium stood.

"Principal Harris couldn't be here today, so I'm filling in," Professor McAllister began, his tone efficient and direct. "I'm not one for long speeches, so I'll keep this brief. In a moment, you'll all receive your match-ups for today, as well as the name of your assigned healer." He looked at the students with his hands on his back. As if he was a military.

"Please meet with your healer first, before finding an appropriate place for your match. Remember, lethal force is forbidden, as is causing crippling injuries. This is a competition, not a battlefield. Good luck to you all."

Moments later, Erik felt his phone vibrate with a new notification. He swiftly retrieved it, unlocking the screen to see the details of his next match.

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MATCH: ERIK ROMANO VS ZAKIR NGUYEN

HEALER: HALIMA O'REILLY

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Upon seeing his match-up, Erik started thinking. However, Amber saw the message he got and her face got serious.

"Your match is against Zakir..."

Erik was familiar with the name Zakir, but couldn't remember who he was exactly. However, Amber and the others were by his side to shed some light.

"I heard the name somewhere, but I don't remember who the guy is."

Gwen intervened. "He was in the top 20 during our first year. But he was kicked out for injuring Patricia for no reason."

However, Amber got something to say to. "Be careful with him. He's... unpredictable and dangerous. His power involves conjuring dark tendrils from his back. He often wields them with weapons, and they pack enough force to send you flying meters away.

Last year, he could only manifest two at a time, but even with that limitation, they were a real threat."

Erik's expression grew serious as he absorbed this information.

"Ah... Damn..."

"Don't think about it, just do your best..." Floyd said. Gwen nodded at her friend's suggestion.

"All right, I will try. Wish me good luck..."

With the weight of Amber's revelation about Zakir on his mind, Erik felt his nerves intensify as he set off to find both his healer and opponent.

Erik spent almost thirty minutes navigating through the bustling crowd of the school. The task of finding both his healer and opponent in the crowded gathering for the tournament proved difficult.

However, he found him. With his tall and lean figure, Zakir had a cool look, stressed by his tanned complexion. His eyes, a deep shade of brown, had a sharpness that was magnified by his neatly tied back, long black hair in a ponytail.

The moment Erik's gaze fell upon Zakir, he had an epiphany, understanding the basis of Amber's characterization of him as a sociopath.

His behavior and attitude were quite off-putting. He deliberately bumped into people, threw menacing glares at anyone who made eye contact.

Erik approached both him and the healer, but as they were searching for a suitable place to fight, Zakir started hurling threats at Erik.

The healer who was with them was surprised by Zakir's behavior. She seemed both embarrassed and bewildered by his actions, with Erik feeling the same.

After searching for a suitable spot, Erik and Zakir finally found one for their match, and they positioned themselves five meters apart, facing each other. Erik wasn't particularly intimidated by Zakir's odd behavior.

While waiting for the healer to get ready, they stood beside their fighting area and exchanged intense stares.

As Erik glanced at Zakir, a combination of curiosity and wariness filled his expression, while Zakir, in turn, observed Erik with a predator-like gaze, relishing the discomfort he provoked, all the while maintaining a mischievous smile.

Zakir's peculiar behavior did not give Erik the impression that he was dangerous. Or better, that he wasn't so crazy as to try to kill or injure him.

"Do I have something on my face?" Erik asked. Sarcasm was clear in his voice.

"Not now, but you will soon have my fist on it," Zakir said.

The response evoked a cringe from Erik, prompting him to question the recurring occurrence of encountering such peculiar adversaries. Yet, he shifted his focus to the seriousness of the match ahead.

Once everything was ready, and an available referee was ok with starting the match, the man's whistle blew, signaling the start of their fight.