

Werewolf 351

Chapter 351: Hollow

'I'm glad she's on our side. It's seriously frightening how effective Olivia's Hunter Class is when fighting Marked enemies.' Gary thought as he watched the female Werewolf take care of yet another member of the Underdogs.

The teenager would have liked to take credit for defeating the group, if only to repay them for capturing him earlier, but with the power boost Olivia had received from the Marks and his Howling Force, she was making short work of them. Well, he didn't mind, especially since he had discovered that it was smarter to let her do the dirty work, as it gave him more EXP this way.

What's more, all of them had already given him ample EXP, though he wasn't sure if that was due to the Marks or them being considered as something akin to 'elite' enemies, seeing as they were in possession of Anti-Altered weapons. Whatever the case, with the last one down, Gary was greeted with another notification.

[Congratulations, you have now reached: Level 20]

[A stat point has been granted]

The Alpha Werewolf would be lying if he claimed not to be at least slightly disappointed by Level 20 being this lacklustre. Granted, the green-haired teenager already knew that Level 25 had a juicy reward waiting for him, one that was a lot more substantial, but if he ever got the chance to talk to whoever had designed this Werewolf System, he would make sure to complain about these milestones not being epic enough.

After his Level Up, he noticed that Kai was visibly struggling against Damion, so he hurried over.

His extra speed boost since defeating and consuming Kirk gave him a great edge, and since then he thought it was best if his stat points were used elsewhere, such as on Energy and Health. However, due to the situation, and worried that his Strength might not be enough, Gary placed both stats into Strength.

[2 Points have been allocated into Strength]

[Your base Strength is now at 25]

Reaching out, Gary grabbed onto the axes, and his grip now was to the point where no matter how much Damion tried to pull, he wouldn't budge.

'How... how could my men lose against just two of them with all of those Anti-Altered weapons?' Damion wondered at that moment. 'I've heard that Greeny defeated Kirk, but it should have only been by a small margin... just what kind of special Altered DNA was in that package that could have allowed him to have gotten even stronger in such a short amount of time?'

Damion was ready to let go of the two axes, but just as he did in his attempt to turn around, his legs had been wrapped up by Olivia's whip. The next second he felt a heavy foot on his chest kick him and now both of the axes were in Gary's hand.

[Full Transformation cancelled]

Slowly, Gary started to shrink in size as his shape reverted to what it once was. The clothes he wore had ripped, though by sheer wonder his lower body was covering enough to not show off his manhood.

"Don't transform so much, it takes up too much Energy." Gary advised, looking towards Kai.

Hearing this, Kai decided to cancel the transformation in his arms. The Beta Werewolf had to focus for a bit, but he was able to keep it at bay. Gary was flabbergasted at how fast Kai was adapting to his new body, which made him feel like an idiot for taking much longer in comparison. With Olivia getting stronger as well, the Alpha Werewolf knew that he would have to work twice as hard to make sure he could continue being the Alpha with pride.

Damion, was getting up off the ground, and immediately went towards Gary, he threw out a kick, which the Alpha Werewolf evaded by moving to the side.

"Your fight is not with me!" Gary shouted.

It was then that Damion could see a leg heading straight for his face, lifting both his forearms he blocked the attack, but slid across the ground somewhat.

“Now, don't you think this is unfair, three against one?” Damion argued.

“Since when was any of this fair?” Gary stated. “Besides, I don't need to get involved.”

Due to being injured before, Kai was a little drained as his body healed up the injuries, he had lost blood as well, but he was determined, gritting his teeth, and still with his eyes like that of a wolf, he was determined to finish this man off.

Running forward, Kai went for another kick. Even without his weapons, Damion was still able to lean back and avoid it, deciding to run in at the right moment. However, the first kick was never intended to hit Damion in the first place, it was just to help build up momentum.

The second it landed, Kai spun his body, throwing out his other leg into a spinning back kick, and the heel of his large foot hit Damion right in the jaw. A cracking sound was heard and the gang leader's face was swung to the side.

“I'm not done!!” Kai shouted, running forward with transformed hands, which he swung at his father. Once again, he lifted his hands to protect himself, but the claws managed to rip through his skin, causing blood to fall from the floor.

“Why... why did you have to do that to Mom?!” Kai screamed at the man underneath him as the grey Werewolf continued cutting skin and flesh away like a grater.

“What are you on about?!” Damion shouted back, letting down his hands in anger and frustration about being unable to fight back. Just like Kai had done earlier, he switched to a more suicidal approach and tried to headbutt his son.

“You were the one who called me over in the first place! If she could kill Simon, then that means she could have killed you t-“

Damion didn't get to finish his last words, as Kai had met him head on. A Werewolf's skull proved to be far more durable than a human one, and while he was still disoriented, the teenager slit his throat.

"You're a foolish idiot who let him do whatever he wanted! If you had only reigned him in earlier, none of us would have been there that day! The only reason she killed him was to protect me...you could never see what that man was, he was even betraying the Underdogs right in front of you, and you still never saw it."

Damion had collapsed on the ground seconds later, with Kai stepping out of the way, allowing him to fall there in place. His father had finally died, his ambition, his long awaited revenge was complete... Yet as he looked at the lifeless body, the sense of accomplishment he had been hoping for did not come.

"Why does it still feel so heavy?" Kai asked, touching his chest, looking at the corpse, which could not give him an answer to that question. Unfortunately, neither could Gary, nor could Olivia who didn't feel like it was her place to meddle in that complicated relationship.

"Don't worry, you have a new family now." Gary said, as he put his hand on the other teenager's shoulder. Soon hearing a ping after, a ping from his system.

Chapter 352: Flawless Hunt

In the middle of all this chaotic mess, Gary's system still managed to surprise him.

[Secret achievement unlocked: Flawless Hunt]

[Whether through luck or strategy, but your Pack managed to pull through and successfully finish its first hunt without suffering any casualties!]

[Reward: 10 Pawn Points (Use at your own discretion)]

The green haired teenager only knew of a few ways to receive Pawn Points, the most reliable one being to either turn someone into a Werewolf, or kill them after they had become one. So far, certain Quests had also rewarded him with Pawn Points, but the most he had ever gotten was the one Knight Point he had received for consuming Kirk. With this generous reward, Gary had effectively doubled his total overall count.

'Secret achievement', huh? I got one a while ago for defeating that colour gang, but last time the reward was merely EXP, so why is the system being so generous now... and what does it mean by 'use at your own discretion' ?

'It's not enough for me to increase my Grade once more, so should I convert it to Stat or Skill Points? Or does the system want me to turn and evolve the others?'

Looking through the system screen, Gary could see that Kai was still standing there looking down at Damion, seemingly in a trance.

'Now is not the time to be worrying about system things.'

"You did it, Kai, you defeated your father! With him gone, Slough will no longer be under the thumb of the Underdogs!" Gary tried to cheer up his friend. "Finally I won't have to worry about my family... so thank you, Kai."

The words 'thank you' somewhat managed to snap Kai out of his deep thoughts, and he was going over the words that Gary had spoken. He let out a sigh, aware of how he would have fared without the intervention of his fellow Werewolves.

"Please, we both know that he was kicking my ass while he was holding on to his axes. This wasn't how I imagined things going down, especially after I forced you to turn me... sorry for that. Anyway, you shouldn't thank me, I should be the one thanking you for coming here in time and saving me, not once but twice... and also for letting me be the one to end that piece of shit.

"Olivia, I also want to thank you for keeping those guys busy in the meantime."

"Sure, sure, not like I had much of a choice in the first place. Speaking of them, what are we going to do? I can sense that a few of them are just pretending to be down, or are unconscious. Do you want me to finish these other guys off?" Olivia asked, since some of them were still breathing, but had been cut severely on the legs to the point where they could no longer move.

“We’ll call the police and let them deal with the rest, without Damion the gang has already fallen apart, there isn’t much for us to do in terms of the Underdogs. However, Slough is a different story.” Kai replied lifelessly. Usually he might have advocated for a more secure ending for them all, but he felt like too much blood had already been shed today.

“Your family might be safe, Gary, but Slough isn’t. The Underdogs, they were doing someone else’s bidding, that’s how you became a Werewolf, and that’s how someone like Kirk was even with the Underdogs in the first place.

“Right now, we have to focus on getting control of Slough before anyone else swoops in and takes the glory for all of our hard work. Damion was trying to meet someone, probably whoever was the one to give him all those Anti-Altered weapons.

“I think it’s best if we don’t risk them seeing our faces. We have to force them, make them have no choice but to come to the next leader of the Slough if they want anything done in our town.” Kai said, clenching his fist.

Kai’s journey felt far from over. The teenager could only hope that his father’s death might bring him the result he wanted, which was why he was using his energy to focus on something else. Whether that was the case or not, Kai was right about all these things.

“I know it doesn’t end here.” Gary said. “That’s why we made a promise to go to the top. We’re in too deep now.”

The two smiled at each other once again, but their touching moment was interrupted by the slamming of a car door, just outside the car park.

“That can’t be the police, there’s no way they got wind of this, and I only just sent them a tip off now, that’s too fast.” Kai stated, worried that it would be those that the Underdogs were planning to meet up with.

“Damion told me that he would have someone extract the Altered DNA from my body, so it’s probably them.” Gary guessed.

“Or the gang in charge of the Underdogs, either way, I’ve had enough killing and risking my life for you brats today.” Olivia complained. The Lady Boss then used her whip to pick up a couple of the Anti-Altered weapons as spoils of war before making a run for it, and the two teenagers quickly followed.

Kai looked at Damion's lifeless body a final time as if he expected his father to rise once more, but naturally nothing happened.

‘I hope you rot in Hell with Simon.’ Kai thought.

A few moments later, a new group of people entered the car park. Three among them wore white lab coats, the rest were wearing strange armour on their body, while also wielding weapons similar to the Anti-Altered weapons still lying around. Not all of them had armour or weapons, as somewhere dressed up in nice suits, sunglasses and more.

They were an odd match for people, that was because these people were the Recoverer.

“Gather information from those that are alive, let's try to find out what went on here.” The man with a white robe at the front ordered.

He eventually walked over to Damion, and looked at the large wound on his neck.

“It looks like the very reason you called us here was the death of you. I bet you started to think you were invincible. It's a shame really, I would have loved to see what you could have become.” The man spoke seemingly to himself.

A short while later, and the rest gave their reports about what the survivors had to say, that being that they had been attacked by three Altered, all of them displaying wolf-like features.

“I see.” The leader noted, before addressing the one in charge of the Recoverer. “Well, make sure no one else learns of this, and it looks like we might be meeting some new business partners soon. Send someone to link up with this city's gang once they're ready.”

“Sir, what if they don't wish to do business with us?” The man asked. “After all, if they have three Altered in their midst, they might already have someone else backing them.”

“In that case, you're to follow the protocol. If they don't need us, we don't need them either.”

Chapter 353: Howlers Rule

To most students, today was just a regular day, with only a handful actually looking forward to attending. Among them was Tom Green, though just like the majority of those type of students not cursing whoever had come up with the idea of school as an institution, his reasons had nothing to do with the classes being taught. No, he was just happy to finally be back in Slough.

His internship at NIRV had come to an end, and he had learned far more than he had ever thought possible, yet all of it was protected under a very restrictive NDA. Keeping all of those secrets was killing him inside, and so he was looking forward to sharing some of them with the one person he knew would never let anything slip. The fact that they both now had such big secrets made Tom feel as if they would finally be on equal footing again.

As soon as his father had driven him back to Slough yesterday, his best friend had been the first person he had contacted, inquiring whether everything was alright in his hometown. However, Gary's reply had been lacklustre to say the least, as if Slough hadn't been attacked by crazed Altered, an event which had made it on more than just the local news.

Before first class began, each of them gave the other a giant grin, but both understood that what they had to say wasn't something either one could risk being overheard, so both agreed to have their lunch on the rooftop.

The first one to speak was Gary. He had decided to come clean and tell Tom everything about the gang business now that the Underdogs were no longer a thing. After what had happened between him and Kai, Gary no longer wanted to keep any more secrets from his oldest friend.

“You've gotta be kidding me?! I've been gone for a week, yet you've basically saved the whole town from those crazed Altered, defeated THE top gang, created two more Billies, both who are working under you, and one of them being THAT Kai?! You've pretty much gone from local gang leader to head

honcho?” Tom’s eyes were basically popping out of his sockets. The teenager had to pinch himself multiple times to make sure this wasn’t just a dream.

“Man, with this kind of news, you should’ve let me go first. In comparison, the things I have to say barely holds up to anyone of those things.” Tom sulked, but he decided to spew his guts out anyway, and ultimately told Gary everything he had seen, even the minor things he hadn’t planned on revealing initially. Just to be safe, he had intentionally left his phone in class, on the off-chance NIRV might have planted a bug in it.

“So that's how they are able to make Altered? They seriously have a crystal that can bring beasts back to life? Hang on, with how many Altered there are, and with other organisations, does that mean everyone has access to such technology? How is that possible that people can create monsters, but nobody knows anything about it? You think there would be videos or something.” Gary wondered out loud.

This train of thought made him curious if Jayden knew about that as well. The AFC was known to work quite closely with the NIRV who sponsored them after all.

“I know, but if you had been there, you would have seen how serious they are about secrecy.” Tom agreed. “Their NDA alone forbids anyone from talking about any kind of stuff. The scientists themselves are not supposed to talk with each other about their respective projects, and I only found out about this because my Dad used up a few favours. Heck, the entire internship I got was actually some sort of exception they made because of him knowing the right people. Honestly, if you weren’t you, I would have probably taken all of it into my grave.”

It was quite amazing the two of them having their own journeys, and the more they thought about what the other was doing, the more happy they felt about the other.

“You know, I plan to go and work at NIRV.” Tom eventually said. “I bet the things I saw were just the tip of the iceberg, and I want to know more about this world. At the same time, I want to help you, Gary. They should know more about what was inside the package that you had to deliver. Perhaps there’s even a way to change you back.”

“Change me back...” Gary repeated. It was a thought that had popped in his head a couple of times, but nowadays, he was content being what he was. The only downside so far was the full moon, but he had a plan for that, and he believed there was a good chance it would work. Well, he would find out in a couple of days...

“Anyway, what is the next step for the ‘Big Bad Wolf of Slough’?” Tom asked jokingly.

“Please don’t call me that.” Gary shook his head and hands vehemently. “Besides, I’m about as useful as a CEO who just signs up on everything, Kai and Olivia are the ones who take care of those things. According to him, we took over ninety percent of what the Underdogs used to own.

“However, unlike them, we’re not extorting businesses. In fact, both of them keep complaining that we are far too nice, to the point where it majorly eats into our profits. Still, for the shop owners it means that rent is low, and we’ve even given them back their land deeds.

“Unfortunately, the Underdogs seem to have used up most of their money to purchase those Anti-Altered weapons, so there aren't many funds left to do the changes that I wanted in this city, to really make it a safe place.

“At the same time, we have to try to protect it from outsiders getting involved. We're going to have to try to get new business to move to this city somehow, at least with a promise that we can protect them or give them something in return. With how much stuff there is to do, I’m really happy I have the two of them to help me out.”

Hearing all of these words, Tom couldn't help but pat his friend on the back.

“Gary, I’ve heard that people can change in the face of responsibility, but your change is a bit too drastic, don’t you think? You who had average grades, were average at sports, yet now here you are, pretty much doing the mayor’s job for him. I was gone for such a short time, yet you’re all grown up.”

Gary playfully punched Tom’s arm, though he made sure to hold back. After such a serious talk, the two of them spent the rest of the break actually eating something, before they returned to the classroom.

During one of the lessons, Gary received a text on his phone from Kai. The others hadn’t come back to school after the infected Altered incident, and the Howlers’ leader was also considering just dropping out. As Tom had put it, with his newfound responsibilities, school did not really fit into his schedule.

[Meeting at the Wolf’s Pool Club. Everyone will be there, important you come today, Gary]

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At the same time, a vehicle was leaving the town of Slough. A bulky student was looking back, aware that he would not return here anytime soon... if at all.

“You really think that guy will help us?” Gil asked Raven who was driving the car.

“He’s our best shot. Even if the Grey Elephants had not been dissolved, we would not have stood a chance against Damion’s crew, yet those Howlers have defeated them. There’s nothing for us to do. My stupid brother had a tendency to piss off the wrong people, but it’s just my luck that the last person to have seen him alive happens to be a freaking Altered who even defeated Kirk Summerfield.”

“What are you planning to do now?” The dropout asked. “I mean in case he won’t help us?”

“We will come back, don't worry about that. That information should be worth something to that Sin, but even if he won’t interfere, we’ll just have to make our name somewhere else... and when we return there will be hell to pay.” Raven answered, throwing his cigarette out the window, as he drove off to start a new life in a Tier-2 city.

Chapter 354: A second chance

It had only been a few days since Gary had last visited the Wolf’s Pool Club, but so much had changed since then that it felt surreal. Slough’s underground world had already been pretty shaken up with the Grey Elephants gone, but now the Underdogs had also been taken care of, the Howlers had effectively become the top-gang in town.

Truth be told, the green haired teenager had expected Kai to contact him far sooner, most likely to send him out on some sort of special assignment to force the small-time gangs to accept the new status quo. However, as it turned out, there had been no need for that. The rumours about Damion’s defeat at their hands had proven effective enough for the other gangs to keep to themselves so far.

The only thing left to do had been to take care of legal things, and Gary had been well-aware that he would have been of no help with that, so he had wisely left all of it to Kai.

As the teenager approached the door, he noticed that there was a sign on the front of the door which showed that the establishment was closed for today. 'Is this because of the meeting? I guess with how much we own now, it doesn't matter if the pool club is closed for a few days or not.' Gary thought.

It was a very strange feeling for him. For most of his life, the Dems had lived close to the poverty line, at least after his father had disappeared. Now, he indirectly owned multiple establishments. Even with just the bits and pieces Kai had scrounged up from his father's old gang, it had been more than enough for Gary to pay off all their debts, including the one for his mother's stay in the hospital.

It made him wonder, just how many families were out there, stricken with poverty, unable to get a good night's sleep like he had in the past, while gangs were seemingly throwing around the type of cash that could solve all of their problems?

Most importantly, what was that money being used on? Purchasing weapons, so they could kill each other, take over the territory of the loser, enrich themselves and start that process all over again? It just didn't make any sense, and it was one of the main things that Gary wanted to change.

'I still need to come up with something that I can tell Amy at some point. She already knows something is up, and even if she really doesn't ask about it, Mum will surely start questioning how we can afford to suddenly move into a nicer apartment. Where should we move, though? Burnham Food Street maybe, or perhaps somewhere more central, so she can be protected just in case?' Gary worried.

It was unlikely that somebody would try to harm his sister, but he didn't want to take any chances. After all, people like Gil were out there. Unfortunately, it had proven impossible to find his former bully's Mark. He had moved somewhere far enough that Gary couldn't see the red scent. However, the fact that he was listed in his Marks was proof enough that he was still alive somewhere...

The high schooler shook his head as he entered the Wolf's Pool Club. He was happy to find Miss Degrace and White behind the bar. The younger woman certainly looked a lot happier now that she had settled in. Both appeared to be doing some refurbishments to add more things to the bar.

"The others are waiting for you downstairs." Miss Degrace informed Gary once she noticed his arrival with a smile on her face. White also shyly waved at him, before resuming the work.

Having learned the tragic past of Marie's mother made Gary want to help them out even more, but he was sure that Kai had everything under control. After all, the upperclassman was the one in charge of the gang's finances, so Gary was sure that Kai would make sure that the two would be provided with everything to lead a decent life.

Reaching the bottom of the stairs, Gary stopped abruptly, his mouth opened wide at the drastic change that had taken place. The storage room with a desk in the corner had turned into a full-fledged office. There were bookshelves at the very back, with a large wooden desk in front. Two large three seater sofas, with a table in the middle, added to the picture. What's more, the room was filled with little trinkets, most of them in the shape of wolves.

It looked like the office of some eccentric fellow with a wolf fetish, rather than a gang office. The only clues that this was actually the latter were the Howlers sitting on the sofas. Only Olivia was standing next to Kai who was sitting behind the wooden desk, looking over some paperwork.

"Holy shit, when did you manage to redecorate this whole place?" Gary couldn't help but ask out loud.

"We told you we dropped out of school, remember? What did you think we've been doing all that time?" Innu replied with a satisfied grin on his face.

"Yes, and all of you did a great job, but that's not why we've called Gary over, now is it? Let's go over the official business first, and then you can go toot your own horn, alright?" Kai interrupted, which rained a bit on Innu's parade, who had obviously been about to list all their accomplishments.

Truth be told, seeing their interaction made Gary feel a bit left out. He hadn't seen the others much due to his school life, and when he had wanted to drop by after that, all of them had been busy with other tasks. Funnily, this just strengthened his resolve to drop out of school and focus on the gang business.

"We Howlers might be a big gang now, but that only holds true within Slough. Once news about Damion's defeat at our hands spread, it will just be a matter of time until other gangs appear and try their luck to get a piece of the pie or the whole thing. There are also the small-time gangs we have to worry about. As such, it is best to keep the main base of operations as our little secret... and what better place than the one that started it all." Kai explained.

Although the big threat was seemingly over, the blonde haired was already thinking several steps ahead. It brought a smile to Gary's face, as his friend looked better than he had done on that day.

"It's good to see everyone again, and I'm glad that no one is hurt." Gary said, smiling. "In fact, since you're all here, there's something I wanted to share with you. I have made the decision to quit school, so I can spend more time helping out with the gang."

The teenager didn't know what he was expecting, but a room filled with silence certainly wasn't it. The look on his friends' faces were a mix of concern and worry.

"What is it? Why does it feel like I said something terrible and wrong." He asked in confusion.

Innu and Austin were both looking in the air, seemingly wishing they could be somewhere else. Kai just let out a deep sigh, while Olivia shook her head. Ultimately, Marie was the one who after fiddling with her hair decided to answer his question.

"Well... you see, that's actually part of the reason we wanted you to come over to talk with you. Please don't be angry about this, and just listen to us before you react, alright? We've been talking the last few days... and we all agreed that it might be for the best if you don't stay in the gang."

Gary took a step back out of pure shock. Sure, in the past he would have hated the idea of being in a gang, and he had never planned to be in one forever, but with everything that had happened it didn't seem as if he had much of a choice. What's more, this gang was something he and Kai had created together and they both had agreed to do their best to make it rise to the top, to improve people's lives.

The Howlers could become a gang that would be different from the others, one that could act as a modern day Robin Hood. In the middle of his daze, Gary saw something from the corner of his eye fly towards it, and he instinctively caught it.

"Stop freaking out and just read it." Kai instructed him. "Hear us out, so that you don't get the wrong idea this time."

Looking at the card that he had just caught, there was a logo that Gary recognised well, consisting of the initial AFA.

Chapter 355: Hidden system

The Altered Fighting Academy was a place where the most talented Altered trained in order to join the AFC, the Altered Fighting Championship. The first thing that came to mind when he saw that card was Xin's image. That school was the reason why she had left Westbridge. Shaking his head, though, he had to deal with the matter at hand.

"What do you mean? You want me to quit the gang and join the AFA instead?" Gary asked.

"That pretty much sums it up." Austin nodded.

"We all talked about this, and you've already done so much for the gang. Without you, we wouldn't have made it this far, but we should be fine for now. All of us want you to be happy and do your own thing." Marie added, though Gary sensed a hint of sadness when she said it.

"So we thought of a way you could enjoy your life, while also still helping out the Howlers. Tom told me all about how the two of you have been obsessed with the AFC since you were little. Joining it should be a dream come true for you, right? And it's not like you don't have the 'skills'." Innu gave him a wink and a thumbs up.

"Think about it, once you become a star in the AFC, you'll have a believable story to tell your family how you earn all your money without dragging them into any kind of gang business. There is also a lot of information that you can find out that might help the Howlers continue to grow, like most of your peers will probably be secretly related to the gangs from the other towns and cities.

"And now that we're the local powerhouse, the Howlers can even act as your sponsors and support you. That way, all of us will benefit. Becoming a successful Altered fighter is the perfect way for you to solve your personal problems while helping the gang." Kai explained.

Gary fell silent as he considered the option his friends presented him with. He had already composed himself to leave Westbridge, and attending the AFA wasn't a bad thing, especially since there was one person he was dying to see. He would just have to inform Tom about it, yet he had a feeling his best friend would most likely also support the idea.

Still, there were a few problems, and Gary clenched his fists as he considered.

“You know Kai, I'm not exactly a... you know, how can I join the AFA?” Gary asked. He remembered when the White Rose had called him out to test his blood, confirming he wasn't an Altered, at least in the common sense.

Kai smiled. “You're worrying about the wrong things. Most Altered your age can't even control their transformations until they get properly trained. Those are the ones who need to get their blood tested to prove their Altered status. You, on the other hand, can just transform. Do you seriously think anybody will bother with any other test once they see it?”

Now, Gary was picturing himself. Since he knew that he was actually a Werewolf, he had only briefly thought about becoming an Altered fighter. Not that he had much of a chance to entertain that idea, until recently he had other problems in his life, yet the most problematic ones had already been taken care of.

“Wait, there are still other things. What are you gonna do about those other small-time gangs, Slough's mayor, my sister, and don't forget that there's that thing I need you and Olivia's help with in a few days.” Gary argued, looking towards the Beta Werewolves because it was nearly time for the full moon.

“You should let us worry about those things.” Innu claimed. “We aren't completely useless without you, Gary. We can handle ourselves. In fact, Olivia brought over some Anti-Altered weapons, and Kai also stated he had something to show us.

“The mayor will be no problem, and honestly I want to say something. You will and always will be the leader of the Howlers in my eyes. Nothing will change that, and if we really need your help, it's not like we can't send someone over to come pick you up.”

“Innu's correct.” Austin added. “We just want you to enjoy your life. Unlike us, you weren't involved in this gang business before. We were already planning to live this type of life, but the same isn't true for you. However, you're the Howlers' leader, if you need help and were to call on us, no matter how big or small we have gotten, you can be sure that we'll come over to help you.”

The atmosphere seemed to be the same around the room, even for Marie who had been close to Kai. Gary had saved her when she had been kidnapped, though he had in fact ended up saving all their lives after the twins had transformed into those abominations.

“We will look after your sister. We did a good job so far, and I'm sure she will understand as well. We can get her a new place, and have her under watch.” Kai revealed. “I have a plan what to do with her so she won't snoop around on her own, and as for the other stuff, it's not like you'll be gone tomorrow. We still have some time for you to show us the ways before you go off.”

Gary could tell how much thought they had put into this decision, and he could feel his eyes tearing up. The people in front of him were some of the most selfless people he had ever met. The teenager was aware that they must have all known his secret by now, at least they thought they knew everything and yet none of them was asking him questions about it, not even about his past with the Underdogs... or how he had become what he was.

No, they were all just planning to move forward, and all of them wanted him to do it in a way that would make him happy first, and put the gang second.

“Thank you everyone, if everyone really thinks this way, then how could I say no? I'll make sure to join the AFA and become a champion of the AFC in record time!” Gary claimed to be pumping his fist. “If you guys don't mind, I'd like to talk with Kai and Olivia about ‘that thing’. We'll join you guys for a couple of pool games in a bit.”

The others didn't ask any questions and simply left the room, leaving the three Werewolves to themselves.

“While I'm away, I guess it will be your job to look after them.” Gary stated as he approached Kai. “I would hate for something to happen to any of you, when I'm gone, so I should do everything in my power to at least give you the strength to help them. Head's up, according to Olivia, this might hurt like hell.”

Opening the system, Gary selected the Beta Werewolf and assigned him the Pawn Points he needed to advance.

[Congratulations, one of your Beta Werewolves (Kyle Hamper) has been upgraded to Knight Grade]

[You may now select his class]

[Hidden conditions have been fulfilled, Special Class available]

Chapter 356: A Unique Class

[Hunter Class]

[A Werewolf Hunter is fast, agile, and sneaky. He focuses on killing his prey quickly, out of sight and from the shadows. He is able to track his targets from a great distance and has great focus.]

[Class perks include: More and better Marks, improved tracking.]

[Protector Class]

[A Werewolf Protector boasts one of the sturdiest bodies of his race. He uses his own body to shield his pack members from any harm, making sure that they will survive.]

[Class perks include: 1 Extra point in Endurance upon each Level Up, faster healing.]

[Warrior Class]

[A Werewolf Warrior could be considered the vanguard of his pack. He leads his pack into battle with his strength. He has exceptional fighting ability and courage, but it is because of this trait, and his role, that this Class boasts the highest fatality rate.]

[Class perks include: Wide range of skills to select from, large Energy pool]

[Shapeshifter Class] (Optimal)

[This Special Class of Werewolf is a master of disguise, capable of transforming into various animals, blessed with an innate understanding of his form. His versatility is unmatched, though limited by his Energy.]

[Class perks include: Various Transformations, big Energy pool]

[Shapeshifter Class has been deemed (Optimal)]

[Based on the Werewolf's traits and special characteristics, Unique Class will be assigned]

Gary was unable to even read through the choices properly, when a new notification popped up that the Class was already being automatically assigned. In the same moment, Kai began screaming in pain, falling out of his seat onto the ground.

The veins around his neck area began to visibly bulge, before the teenager felt the muscles in his body contract and relax over and over again. They were tensing up incredibly hard, worse than any cramp he had ever suffered, and not just in one particular area but all over his body, yet the worst thing was that this excruciating process was accelerating.

'Holy shit, Olivia wasn't kidding when she told me it hurt like hell. Should I've given him more of a warning? No, I don't think anything can prepare you for this type of agony. Perhaps I should've prepared something to bite down on?' Gary awkwardly watched Kai suffer, unable to help him in any way. Fortunately, it only took a couple of minutes until he received a new message.

[Your Beta Werewolf (Kyle Hamper) has successfully become a Grey Werewolf Shapeshifter]

The Alpha Werewolf was quite surprised that the Unique Class was still a Werewolf Shapeshifter, merely with the prefix 'Grey', which coincided with Kai's fur colour. This, in turn, begged the question whether it had some other effect he wasn't aware of, and if so, what did it mean for him, who was a brown Werewolf, or Olivia, who was a black Werewolf.

"What... what the hell did you do?" Kai asked, his eyes scornful, yet his voice was too weak to convey his anger properly at the moment. He had a hand on the table, but he lacked the energy to stand up. The

blonde teenager was looking at his body, and as the pain started to reside he noticed the change in his body, almost as if it had gotten lighter somehow.

“Hah, you can consider yourself lucky.” Olivia stated with a certain amount of schadenfreude in her voice. “At least you got a warning, and besides him and me, nobody saw your sorry state. In my case, I just thought I was gonna die in the middle of the street... and once I got better, my embarrassment made me wish I had died.”

[Grey Werewolves are a rare breed who gain extra strength whilst in the company of their kin, even if they're not part of their Pack. Due to this, Grey Werewolves are often feared by their own kind, as they tend to come out on top when fighting their own.]

‘Thanks, System. So that should mean the colour of the fur is not just a coincidence after all. I guess Kai just was always meant to be a Werewolf, he learned everything at a quicker rate as well, and now he even has a Unique Class. Oh well... I trust Kai, so it should be okay.’

From what he had been able to read from the description, Gary guessed that Kai should be able to change into an actual wolf, and probably even other animals. However, just like with Olivia, although the system gave a lot of information about the class, individual things such as Skills and Stats were not something he had a way of seeing.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t know it would be this bad. However, I promise you that you didn’t suffer for nothing. Like I said, I need the two of you to be at the top of your game when I’m gone. I would hate it if you or the others got hurt in my absence.” Gary apologised. “It’s hard to explain what I did, but let’s just say as the original Werewolf there are some things that I can do that you guys can’t.”

Kai was obviously curious to press for more, but he decided not to press Gary. If anything, he was more excited to find out what the changes were in his body and what he could do now.

“Tonight.” Gary said, having noticed the eager look in his friend’s eyes. Perhaps due to the time the two of them had spent in the cell together, the green haired teenager was able to see and read more of what Kai was thinking.

“We will meet up in the forest tonight, and we can test out some of the new tricks you’ll have up your sleeve, alright? On top of that, we also need to talk about what we’re going to do on the day after tomorrow, so that there won’t be three blood-crazed Werewolves running around Slough.”

“We need to see if we can get through it, and if we can, we need to make a plan for the future. Hopefully, the two of you will be able to replicate what I’ve planned, and ideally it will work even if we aren’t together.”

Remembering what had occurred on the night they had met Werewolf Billy, Kai knew the dangers of what could happen. For now, the three of them started to head upstairs. Olivia was planning to go her own way and would meet them up in the forest later, while Gary and Kai would have a relaxing time playing a couple of games.

After all, he wouldn't be seeing them as much now compared to before. When they reached the top of the stairs, the others were waiting, playing, joking and having a laugh with each other. In fact, Gary even noticed that Tyler was present in the room, the former cashier turned driver who was pretty much a member of the Howlers now.

‘I guess these are the people that have decided to stay around me. I should be fair to them, right?’ Gary thought, clenching his fist.

“Guys!” Gary exclaimed, and everyone in the room turned to look at him. “There’s something important I need to tell you all. I’m aware that all of you already know my secret... and I’m thankful that none of you have asked me about it. Before I go, I want to set the record straight. I’m not an Altered... I’m actually a Werewolf...”

Chapter 357: A Star promotion

‘I can’t believe I’m actually here.’ Blake thought to himself as he took in the sight of the few hundred Altered Hunter who had gathered in this secret base today. Up until now, his father had been the only other Altered Hunter he had ever come in contact with.

It hadn’t been easy getting here. His father had taken him across the country into some seemingly random no-name Tier-4 town, where they had been picked up by a guide who had then dropped them off in a car park. Before leaving, the woman had pressed a certain button combination, which had made it so that the elevator had let them out below the supposed basement that went deep underground.

Unsurprisingly, there was barely any light down there. Fortunately, that wasn't really an issue for Blake or the others. All those who were in attendance were dressed in the full set of an Altered Hunter, including masks capable of night vision.

After a quick verification of their identities, father and son had both been separated, led to their respective rows to be amongst their peers. In Blake's case, this meant being led to the seemingly biggest faction of other unranked Altered Hunters, most of whom were around the teenager's age.

"I'm sorry to have kept all of you waiting for this long." A middle-aged man with curly hair suddenly said as he came on to the stage. He was the only one that wasn't wearing a mask, though the pair of black sunglasses on his face appeared to allow him the same night vision as the rest of them enjoyed.

Nobody addressed the oddity of those sunglasses while being underground, especially given their own attire, but also because nobody dared to disrespect that man. Edvard Heimdallr was in his early forties, yet not only did he hold the title of 'youngest five-star Hunter' in their organisation, his Altered kill count was in the triple digits, making him a prime candidate to be the successor of the current leader.

"Now that we're all here, I won't bore you with some long-winded speech. After all, today is not about me, but all about you! Let us honour those amongst you who have earned their promotion!!!" Edvard lifted his hands out and was met by the loud cheers of the audience.

Blake was surprised to actually see his usually calm and rational father join in the cheering. This was a first for him, and far more emotion than he had ever witnessed from him, in any of his rugby matches.

"As is tradition, I shall start from the highest promotion. Although we don't have any new five-star Hunters joining us today, there are a healthy number of you who will walk away with their fourth star today. I have high hopes for all of you!" Edvard revealed as he began calling out names, including Ozacas Hunt.

Nearly a dozen of them climbed on the stage front. They all undressed everything above their waist, revealing their shoulders with the three stars. This was a moment of pure joy for them, each one of them looking forward to what was to come.

From the side, a large man walked in, holding on to a glowing black stick with a star at the end. The room became completely quiet, only the sounds of the man's footsteps resounded, until he reached the leftmost Altered Hunter.

Without any warning, he pressed the hot metal to their skin, leaving it there for a few seconds, before moving on. The sound of searing flesh filled the room, but nothing else. Each one of those Hunters endured the pain with a stoic face, rather portraying extreme joy at becoming four-star Hunters.

It might seem like a mere branding, but every star was testimony to their capabilities, and proof of their success. In a way, it was everything to them.

Next came the two-star Hunters who had earned their third star, the one-star Hunters who had earned their second star... until it was finally time for the youngsters who would receive their very first star today.

"Ah, it is always a pleasure to see our promising youth receive their first branding. It's a rite of passage that all of us have gone through, one that marks that you've joined our ranks as fully fledged Altered Hunters. Your generation will be the one to succeed us, and I'm looking forward to your future! First up, Blake Hunt!"

Walking up, Blake proudly took off his robe and mask placing them on a table to the side, he looked at the metal pole, and then turned to the crowd. Here he could see his father with his arms crossed. Although Blake couldn't see his facial expression, he was certain that his father was proud of him.

'My first star...' The teenager wondered whether he truly deserved it. After all, the first Altered he had actually killed was Billy, and he had only managed to do so by teaming up with Gary. Just as planned, the police had found the clues that pointed to the Altered Hunters, allowing Blake to take credit for the kill.

Then, the news channel had recorded him having killed a few of the infected Altered who had attacked Slough, so upon his return Ozacas Hunt had shared the good news with his son that he had earned his first star. While the Altered Hunters didn't exactly approve of Blake acting in such a public manner, there was undeniable proof that he had taken out those Altered, and taken on Billy had also done its part to convince the leaders that Blake was worthy of promotion.

Blake had little time to overthink the situation. He was forced to grit his teeth, unwilling to be the first one to cry out, even though the smell of his sizzling flesh made him want to throw up.

Once everyone had received their branding, all those who had gone up on the stage had been told to follow behind Edvard. The man pushed in a few bricks, which opened up a secret entrance, and the group entered what appeared to be a giant warehouse. It was so enormous that Blake couldn't see the end of the walls.

“For those who are new, I shall explain,” Edvard spoke. “Everything the Altered Hunters have been able to gather over the years has been brought here today. Depending on your star ranking, different sections are available to you. Our best weapons and armours are naturally reserved for our best, so take that as a motivation to improve.

“As much as I'd like to outfit all of us to the teeth, we don't have an unlimited supply, and despite our technological advancement, we're unable to forge weapons that are as effective as those of our predecessors. Not to mention, it wouldn't fare well if they got into the hands of the wrong people. Anyway, forgive me ramblings, please enjoy and pick out your new weapons.”

Blake was extremely excited to look at what he could get. Thanks to his father's influence, he had actually used far more advanced weapons than his peers, he was perfectly aware that it was more of a loan from his father, while these weapons would actually be his.

Just as he started to walk to the one-star section, Blake spotted something at the very back. Even beyond the five-star section, there was something held inside a glass case.

“What...is that...I can feel its energy.” Blake wondered out loud.

“That, my young friend, is the most ancient, but also the most powerful piece of equipment we own.” Edvard put his hand on the teenager's shoulder. “According to records, this Red Dragon armour has been a gift from the best friend of our founder.”

Chapter 358: A danger to all

Throughout their long history that dated back for more than a millennium, their secret society had had a lot of different names, 'Altered Hunters' was merely the latest one on that list. One of the downsides of modern technology was that it had become impossible for their activities to remain secret, especially

since their targets had the status of modern day celebrities. Thanks to various news channels, in the eyes of the public they were nothing more than modern day terrorists.

Despite the public outcry, they nevertheless continued their noble mission for the sake of humanity. While times had changed, the Altered Hunters still used the swords, axes, and shields of their predecessors. According to the history books that the Altered hunters kept, beasts used to roam the world. And to defeat them, they did so using special weapons made from the beast themselves. In the past these were called beast weapons but were now called the Anti-Altered weapons.

Thanks to the recorded techniques of their predecessors, the Altered Hunters were trained in the ways to channel the most power out of those ancient weapons. Being able to focus on one's own energy and passing it through the weapon would bring extra benefits to the wielder, usually granting them extra power, beyond that of a professional athlete, which was what allowed them to have even ground with the Altered in the first place.

The better the weapon, the stronger the buff its wielder would receive. From what Blake had read, some weapons were even imbued with special traits, such as igniting the weapon without any source of fire being present... and he was dying to earn one of those in the future.

The armour at the very back, though, Blake could instinctively tell that it was a step above everything else lying here. It was complete and there was a dark deep red colour to it, with a dragon scale like pattern on different parts of the armour pieces. Just looking at it made him feel invigorated.

"Why is it locked away?" Blake asked. "How many stars would I have to reach to try it on?" There weren't any visible star requirements attached to it, so the teenager decided to ask, already prepared that the answer would be a humiliating one.

Edvard chuckled a little at Blake's eagerness, reminded of the time he himself had first laid eyes on it. Amused, he strongly patted Blake's back. This simple action made a deep sound, but unwilling to yield in front of the five-star Hunter, the teenager stopped himself from stumbling, keeping his two feet hard on the ground.

"That is our trump card." Edvard started to explain. "Although this place is a well-kept secret, and we do our best to make sure there are no spies, we can't rule out the possibility that one day our enemies might find it.

“If it comes to that, White Rose would send all of its forces over, and should they do that... I honestly doubt our ability to deal with them. That’s why it is of utmost importance that you do your best to make sure to choose your targets carefully, pick the right weapons and plan thoroughly before taking on the Altered of your choice. The less attention you garner, the better it will be for your safety, as well as all of ours.”

“Still, some things are inevitable, and in the worst case that armour will be our saving grace. Believe me, I understand your desire perfectly, it has a very alluring ‘call’ to it... but the rules are clear, it is only to be used in such an emergency when our very existence is at risk. As such, I can’t just give it to you.

“Nevertheless, the rules also state that the strongest fighter should be the one to wear it. If you work hard for the group, gain more stars, then you might one day become an existence worthy of protecting us all.”

Blake felt a little down by the answer, but he hadn’t expected too much in the first place. He let out a sigh, before he opted to make use of his limited time here to search for a decent weapon and armour.

There were many, and black was a predominant colour choice amongst the armour. Blake had upgraded his set, picking out a few items that matched him most. His fighting style was one that focused on speed, agility and dexterity, so he needed to be light and not too heavy.

Luckily, everything had already been neatly organised into sections for them to easily pick what suited them.

After that, Blake headed to the weapon section, where he already knew what he wanted, a pair of dual short swords. They had done him well, though there was another reason for his choice. A pair of dark red blades had managed to catch his eye.

Usually, he wouldn't have picked red since the colour was easier to see in the dark, but these were quite the dark tone, and after seeing the dragon armour they fascinated him a little. When looking at the hilt of the sword, Blake noticed an emblem on the guard.

‘I’ve never seen this marking before?’

Usually, the blacksmiths in the past would put a special marking on all the weapons they created. That way, they could make a name for themselves if a famous warrior used their weapons. Many of the items had one, but a shield with two spears going in a cross shape behind it, was something he had never seen before.

'It's a bit weird on a pair of swords, but I like the weight of them.' Blake gave them a couple of swings before putting them away, happy to keep them.

'When fighting Billy, I managed to see those white lines mentioned in our books... if I can just manage to find out how I did it, I should rise quickly.' Blake thought.

Roughly thirty minutes after they had been let in, everyone was equipped with new gear. While the one-star and two-star Hunters were free to leave, Edvard instructed the three-star Hunters and above to stay, for he had something important to discuss with them.

Inside the base meeting hall, there was a large round table, but there were no seats. Edvard himself stood with his hands on the table, while the others stood there patiently.

"I trust in the judgement of each one of you, and while working on your own has worked so far, I'm afraid that we have a very serious situation on our hands. There have been multiple reports of something quite concerning as of late." The Altered Hunter leader explained as he pulled out a syringe and placed it on the table.

"I assume some of you have perhaps seen or heard about this 'black liquid'. As of now, it is predominantly being passed around in the lower tier towns. It appears to be either a failed experiment or an early prototype for a new Alterification method. Whoever uses it turns into a type of crazed Altered."

"Their usage so far appears to be limited, but unless we do something about it, incidents like the one in Slough might very well start appearing all over the country. The reason for calling you here is that I need you all to make this our number one priority. We need to find out more about this black liquid, preferably its origin. To do that, we're going to have to start being more active in the higher tier cities, which means your jobs will also become more dangerous."

Chapter 359: The AFA

“Thanks for the ride!” The cheery voice of a teenager sounded as he jumped out of the taxi cab, taking in his surroundings. The building in front of him was far larger than anything he had ever seen in his life, and this was just a tiny part of the campus.

“Are you serious? Have you ever heard about tipping? Come on, I drove you for three hours!” His driver complained. The request from the teenager had sounded absurd, but since he had paid in advance, Jared had agreed to drive the teenager all the way here. Still, part of him had done so in the hopes of a nice tip for this inconvenience, especially given their destination was catered to a special type of people, Altered.

“I’m sorry, I paid you all I had on me. Is it okay if I tip you next time?!” The male teenager cheekily scratched the back of his head. The taxi driver had trouble believing it, but there was not much he could do. Letting out a few profanities, he drove off.

This little scene had caught the attention of the passers-by, who couldn’t help but comment on the absurdity of the situation. “Have you ever heard of someone coming to this academy who couldn’t afford to tip? That makes no sense, he must just be really stingy.”

“Maybe that’s why he dyed his hair green, thinking that it might bring him the green.” Another commented with a smirk on his face, seemingly proud of his use of words.

Gary had no problem hearing them, even if they were some distance away, but their comments did little to spoil the mood. Once more, he gazed at the large campus building, a place he had never dreamt of seeing in real life. Truth be told, the teenager still had cash on him, and not exactly a small amount. Kai had given him enough to last a year in Slough, but since he had been warned that his stay here might be expensive, he had lied to his driver.

‘This is it! This is all me from here on out. I don’t have anyone to help me, or get me out of any trouble I might cause.’ Gary thought, as he took in a deep breath and took his first steps forward on to the soil of the academy.

His heart rate was higher than usual, though fortunately not at a level that he showed any signs of transforming, but it couldn’t be helped. Unlike everyone else who had come here today, he wasn’t exactly an Altered, and if that came out, he shuddered to consider the consequences.

'Kai said it would be okay, and he's smarter than me, so he should be right.' Gary told himself.

The academy was large, and rather than walking straight ahead through the first main building where students would usually go, instead the group of students was following the signs to some other place.

While following the signs, Gary closely observed the group he was now part of. A quick headcount put them at close to a hundred.

'Man, with all these fancy clothes and jewellery, they even make Kai look humble in comparison. Did they come here to attend the AFA or some nightclub to woo some girls?' Gary thought to himself, as he internally rolled his eyes.

Speaking of girls, the group he was in consisted of around a third of them, all of them beauties who could easily be models, though perhaps some of them actually were. Gary wondered how 'natural' their appearances actually were. No matter their genetics, money could certainly buy them the best skincare routines, the best nutrients growing up, and if all of that didn't work, then there was always plastic surgery.

'Most of them should either be the children of someone rich and powerful, or be so talented that they were sponsored by a big and powerful organisation. I might be the sole exception to that.'

Thinking about this, Gary remembered Kai's words how if anyone was to ask about his backing, he was to say the Howlers. Apparently that was what was filled out on the application form as well.

Eventually, the Werewolf's eyes rested on a teenager with black hair that was split down the middle. Heightwise, he was about the same height as him, and he estimated that age-wise there shouldn't be much of a difference either. He was dressed in a normal blue shirt and an inconspicuous black hoodie, though, ironically, that made the guy stand out even more in the current crowd.

Eventually the signs stopped when all the students were out on a large open field. There were a few campuses that could be seen in different directions, but they were far away. Still, they knew they were at the right place because three professors were sitting down in their seats, apparently having waited for them.

The oldest one of the lot that had an extremely long beard, and he was the only one to stand up. "As you all should be perfectly aware, the AFA is a competitive place to get in, and we pride ourselves in only accepting the best of the best... Unfortunately for you, we don't consider you as such. You were not invited here by our scouts, nor did any of your families or other backing have a big enough influence for us to trail you separately to let you in."

Gary had to suppress himself from grinning when the faces of his peers dropped. This statement had obviously insulted their egos. For people, who must have been pampered since birth, it was not easy to swallow being told that they were simply leftovers instead of someone truly special.

The Werewolf was perfectly fine with being called as such, he knew that it was the truth of the matter, which was why he had come here in the first place, to the AFA trials. The professor held up his hand, spreading all his fingers out, slowly moving it from the left to the right side, as if to make sure that everyone could get a good look.

"Five. Do you know what that number represents? That's how many open places we have this year. Now, don't be too happy about it. There's no guarantee that all of them will be filled by you. In fact, it wouldn't be too surprising if all of you fail and get sent back home today.

"Don't forget, we didn't invite you, so you'll have to prove to us that we were wrong!"

"Of course!!!" Gary shouted back.

Unsurprisingly, all the other teenagers gave him strange looks. The professor wasn't really asking them a question. Still, Gary didn't care because he was just too excited to be here.

Surprisingly, the old professor didn't chide him. No, he actually smiled at his antics. "I like your spirit. Let's see if you'll stay this chipper after the test. The first one starts now. Show us what type of Altered you are! If you can't even do that, then there's no reason for us to waste any more time with you!"

Chapter 360: Troubled Talent

Gary watched the participants get called out one by one to show off their Altered forms in front of the three men. He was feeling anxious, though less due to the test and more because the teenager was currently realising his lack of knowledge with regard to the academy itself.

Gary had only known about the AFA's existence in general, but he had never looked into its inner workings. After all, the base requirement for attending had always been to be an Altered, something which should have been impossible for the old him. Alas, even after he had turned Werewolf, he had been too preoccupied with other things to fill that gap in knowledge.

As such, the only thing he knew about the three judges were their names because they had name plates in front of them. Unfortunately, none of those rang any bells for him. Aside from them not being some Altered fighters, he wasn't sure whether they were merely helpers, or perhaps some renowned professors who had come today to test them.

Every teenager was told to demonstrate their transformation in front of everybody. They were to show off the extent to which they could transform into, and how much control they had. All of it was being recorded, and once they were done, they were told to head further down, where the man with the large belly and muscular arms would ask them questions about what type of Altered they were, if they had any special traits, and what their speciality was.

'I'm actually quite surprised... that most of the people here kinda suck.' Gary thought, scratching his head because so far they had collectively witnessed seven teenagers come up, all unable to transform. The eighth one was the first who show some potential, though it was just one hand that could transform.

Still, despite the bespectacled man's earlier claim of making them fail outright, all those that had been unable to transform, had been told to take a blood test before getting a chance to talk about their Altered.

'I guess they must also be looking at potential. There is a good chance that some of them actually have quite a rare and powerful Altered which will grow in the future. At the same time, it's not like they are testing our physical capabilities with this test either.' Gary thought, as he noticed that the third judge had yet to say anything, seemingly juggling his attention between his notes and the teenagers eager to prove themselves.

Fortunately, not all of them were duds. Eventually, those appeared who were able to turn their hands into deadly claws, whose eyes changed into that of reptiles, wings sprouted from their back and other abilities which were clearly inhuman.

'Some of these Altered forms look really fascinating and powerful... but if that's really as far as they can change, I understand why they didn't get scouted. Still, they were at least lucky enough to get

sponsored by some company. I bet those unable to transform are mostly the kids of rich families from Tier-2 cities or above.

'What about Xin... I wonder how far she managed to get? With her skills, she might even be joining the AFC for her debut match soon.' Gary thought.

"Numba Coal, next!" The man in the middle shouted out the name.

The teenager who came forward was the one Gary had noticed earlier, for he was the one looking out of place due to the lack of brand clothes. As he walked up, the ones waiting were whispering snide comments about his clothing, the way he walked and his posture.

Honestly, Gary would have loved to slap all their faces. After all, he didn't have the same upbringing as the people around him. The relatively nice clothes on him were mostly because Kai had picked out his wardrobe for today and even then, he had turned down quite a few items, solely he had felt those wouldn't suit him.

Standing in position, Numba clenched his hands and soon a change appeared on his body. It wasn't on his hands, legs, back or face like the others, instead it was on top of his head. Two large, white horns had grown out.

"Hahah, what is he, some type of Goat Altered!" One of the students pointed and laughed, with a few others joining him.

"Shut up!" Gary couldn't take it any more. He turned around to face the one who had started all of it. "You guys have yet to go forward and demonstrate that you're any better than all those who couldn't even transform part of your bodies! He's better than all of those, so how can you make fun of him?!"

Gary wasn't sure with what kind of expectation he had coming here, but watching a group of rich teenagers make fun of somebody certainly wasn't part of it. After experiencing all kinds of things while he had been part of the Underdogs, and even more after he and Kai had created the Howlers, their behaviour just seemed... so childish. No one around scared him, and because of that, Gary wasn't afraid to speak up when someone annoyed him.

“The boy is right.” Professor Humfree who had been speaking so far chimed in. “None of you have earned the right to look down on your peers. You are simply here thanks to your parents or your sponsors, but the place you will be going to next, assuming you will actually be among the lucky few, none of those will be able to help you.

“You should be very careful in how you act before you have earned your place in this academy.”

After hearing these words, everyone settled down a little, and Numba was told to go on and answer the same questions as his predecessors.

“Well then, young man, let’s see whether you have the qualifications!” The man pointed at him, seemingly skipping over others, though Gary didn’t mind. Of course, the teenagers that he had told off just moments ago were scowling and staring at him. Unaware that he could hear them, they were whispering about him.

“I tell you right now, I'm going to laugh my head off, if he can’t transform after all his grandstanding. ... better yet, I hope he’s also some type of lame Herbivore looking Altered.”

Ignoring those hateful comments, Gary casually pulled his sleeves back, unwilling to ruin his clothes. In an instant, he had transformed both his arms. The brown fur could be seen coming through his skin, with little parts of it falling off, almost shedding as a stronger hide appeared. At the same time, his hands became larger, with his fingernails extending into claws.

For a moment, Gary looked at the three men. Noticing that he had their full attention, he continued by making his teeth transform next, revealing four large canines, before his eyes narrowed, though without changing their colour. He had made sure to step just before that point.

“Impressive, very impressive, is that the limit of your transformation, or are you able to do more?” Humfree asked.

Gary looked at the other students who seemed to be taken aback, surprised at what had happened so far, but opening his mouth, he told a lie.

“That's my limit.” Gary answered, while walking off to the next man to answer his question.

Humfree locked eyes with his colleague and nodded, which prompted Professor Wood to look up Gary's information and mark him as an interesting specimen.

'Figures he isn't one of those fancy pants who come here right after mommy and daddy sponsor them their Altered. So you're sponsored by... the Howlers group? Don't think I've ever he- no wait... wasn't there a report a while ago about the Howlers.'

Doing a quick search, Mr Wood, brought up information about Slough, and he started to find out a few things. For one, how the town was now under the control of those Howlers, a gang that had come out of seemingly nowhere. Nevertheless, that wasn't a problem as far as that AFA was concerned. As long as those kids were powerful enough, they didn't care who was behind them..

'A new rising Gang, and one from a Tier-3 town. He has a lot of talent, that's for sure, and his Altered form looked vicious to say the least, but I fear that he might run into a lot of trouble if the others were to find out about this background. Those like him struggle the most in the AFA, especially if they are truly talented.'

Still, when looking through the article, there was something else that Mr Wood spotted, a certain video, about an Altered facing the Rookie champion of the AFC. Clicking on the video, there were clips of the fight online being shown.

Seeing this, and looking at Gary, a smile crept on the professor's face.