

Werewolf 361

Chapter 361: A second chance

After Gary's little display the testing proceeded without a hitch. Showing off his transformation had been enough to convince the three men about him being an Altered. He wondered what excuse he would have to make if they were to suddenly ask him for a blood test but in the end, he was fine. at least for the next couple of weeks.

[25 days until the next full moon]

At the moment the teenager just had a loose plan of claiming that he was sick on that day, which would hopefully be enough to allow him to skip classes on that day. Gary intended to put some more thought into it, but first, he would have to make sure that he actually got in, though judging by the minute reaction of the three men he was at least sure to have passed this test.

Gary wasn't big-headed but he believed that his transformation out of all of them was the most impressive.

"Alright, we've collected all your data now. I will now read out the names of those that are eligible for the next test!" Professor Humfree began, only to be interrupted by one of the teenagers.

"Hang on a moment! This can't be it, right? All you did was find out whether we could transform and what type of Altered we are! Shouldn't there at least be an assessment of our fighting ability? You can't tell me just because I'm not that great at transforming, that I'm necessarily weaker than all those who could!"

The professor raised an eyebrow at the student, and strange energy began radiating off him. Behind Humfree there was almost a black fog of darkness and it was rising by the second. If one was to take a deep look, there was almost a pair of eyes as well. Honestly, Gary didn't know if he was just seeing things or not but judging from the looks on the other's faces they could at least feel it.

Following an instinct inside of them, many of the students took a step back, with only a dozen remaining where they were. This included both Gary, as well as Numba who the Werewolf had been keeping an eye on.

“Do you really think that you’re in a position to argue about OUR rules after we already graciously allowed you to even show up today? If you don’t like it, then you’re free to join one of the other academies.” After saying this, Humfree cleared his throat and began reading out the names on the list one by one, a total of twelve names.

There were groans, tears, sobbing and anger from the students, some even going so far as to stomp on the ground in frustration. Meanwhile, those whose names had been called were also showing a wide mix of emotions, ranging from some who had a smile covering their whole face, to those who were shedding tears of joy. For a second, both Gary and Numba made eye contact, both of them smiling at each other.

‘All of us are those who didn’t get intimidated by the professor just now... they seem to really know what they are doing.’ Gary realised.

“This makes no sense!” The student from before protested once more. He was better dressed than the majority, though with his hair gelled back and combed over, Gary felt like he was more suited to take part in a film rather than the assessment for an Altered Academy.

“With all due respect, Professor Humfree, I can understand your decision to pick those among them who could transform, but what about those who couldn’t?! How is it fair for you to pick them but deny those among us who at least were able to transform part of our body into our Altered form?! You have to at least explain why you picked them over us!”

It was true, three out of the twelve students hadn’t been able to transform at all, and them being Altered was only confirmed due to the blood test. Gary hated to admit it, but the loud mouth had a point.

“Here I thought that FOR ONCE we would go through this assessment without one of you popping up to cause a scene. So, do you believe that you’re wiser than us, who have been doing this job for more years than you’re alive?” Professor Hai questioned as he stood up. Given his mean looking face, many of the teenagers took a step back when he suddenly got involved.

“I’m tired of explaining those things to brats like you, so as the saying goes ‘seeing is believing’. Whoever thinks that they deserve this chance more than the ones we’ve selected, I’m willing to give you that opportunity. All you need to do, is beat one of them in a fight.”

The students looked at each other, they had never expected to fight each other this early on, at least not until they had been fully admitted into the academy. What's more those among them who should have passed felt nervous, now that they would have to protect their place, while those who had been denied started to become confident.

"Fine!" The gelled back hair kid stepped forward throwing his blazer onto the ground, He kicked off his nicely polished shoes, and unbuttoned a few of the buttons on his white shirt.

"I want to fight that guy!" Pointing out his finger, he pointed to a calm-looking short brown-haired student, one of the three who hadn't been able to transform. For a second, the student looked toward professor Hai who just smiled and nodded.

"You want to keep your place, don't you? There's no need for you to hold back, whatever happens in this fight, the academy will make sure that all of it will be taken care of."

The others made some distance for them. Honestly, the sadness and anger from before had turned into excitement for all those that had failed. Seeing how this would go, some of them thought that they might still have a chance to prove themselves.

"Let's do this!" The black-haired student shouted, and immediately his hands started to transform, growing to twice their size and forming into pincers.

Watching this, Gary started to think.

'If that kid wins, then there is a good chance all of us will have to fight for our positions.' Gary thought.

Chapter 362: A Different Level

Running forward the Crab Altered student swung his arm, but the other was able to duck down underneath. At the same time, he had used his leg to kick the other from underneath, causing his opponent to fall to the ground.

The Crab Altered could see a fist come towards him and moved his larger claw directly in front to block the attack. As the fists landed on the claw many of the onlookers winced in pain, imagining how much it had to hurt.

Rolling to the side and getting up, the Crab Altered looked at his opponent, expecting him to be in some type of pain, but he wasn't where he had left him. Instead, before the challenger realised that his opponent had jumped up, a kick came down, aimed straight at the side of his head.

"Damn it, that was cheap!" The Crab Altered complained, his head was hurting, but thanks to his Altered physique he was at least still conscious. Unfortunately for him, starting with that moment he was forced to defend himself from the flurry of punches coming his way. Loud bangs were heard each time the knuckles of the student would hit the hard casing of his pincers.

'What the hell?! How is this possible?! Are this guy's hands made of metal or something? They should be broken by now... or at least injured, so why am I the one suffering all the damage?!' The teenager thought in frustration.

Eventually, a cracking sound could be heard... the Crab Altered's pincer. A shooting pain ran through his body and dropping his guard at that moment, a fist connected with his face, this time actually knocking him out.

'Wow... I wasn't expecting that at all.' Gary thought in amazement. 'Still, this makes one thing clear, we weren't just selected through a fluke. He might not be able to transform, but his body is already above that of a normal person. Just how strong will he be, when he learns to transform?'

"Well, after seeing this fight, does anyone else wish to challenge those we've passed?" Professor Hai asked with a large grin on his face. Around a dozen hesitantly raised their hand. "In case any of you wanted to be a smart-ass, you're not allowed to challenge someone who has just fought."

After that statement, those hands came down. The majority was now disheartened once again. They tried to put themselves in the Crab Altered's shoes, but they couldn't imagine beating the person who had just fought. They could see clearly how strong, and how fast his movements were.

Eventually, shortly before they dispersed, one person raised their hand and walked forward. They had short spiky hair and Gary recognised this person immediately. He was the one the Werewolf had shut up because he had made fun of Numba.

'I bet he's going to pick a fight with that Numba guy. Well, out of all those that could transform those horns looked the least impressive, and after seeing what one of those that couldn't transform could do...' Gary wouldn't blame him if the guy challenged Numba.

"If only I could fight in his stead, I would love to shut him up without suffering any consequences." The teenager mumbled to himself.

"I pick the green-haired one." The spiky fellow pointed.

Hearing this, the onlookers were whispering amongst themselves, obviously as confused as Gary himself was. Out of all of those that had passed, his transformation had been undoubtedly the most vicious and deadly-looking Altered forms they had ever seen. Not to mention Gary had been able to transform at the snap of a finger, something only two others had been able to, yet his had been far more smooth.

'The ones that can't transform seem to have something special about them, which should be the reason why the professors picked them. They might actually be the strongest among them, and even if that guy was the strongest among the three, there's no need to test out the other two. They could tell the difference between the talented ones that couldn't transform and the ones that couldn't. which means they are deemed better than any of us that could.

'So if that's the case, then I just need to pick the one that stood out the most, since he should be the weakest!' That was the student's train of thought, but he also had another, more personal reason to pick Gary.

'Besides, I have a trump card that suits this type of fight very well. Given their image, they shouldn't go back on their word, and as long as I win, it doesn't matter how I beat my opponent. You dared to talk crap to me, so suffer the consequences.' The student smirked.

In the end, Gary didn't complain as he walked forward and stood where the other fighting teenager had stood.

"Now, since you are both able to transform, we'll tweak the rules slightly." Professor Hai announced. "Once I shout 'start', you'll begin your fight, and only then are you allowed to transform, got it?"

The two nodded in agreement and at the same time, a notification appeared with a ding before the Werewolf.

[New Quest received]

[Honorable Fight 0.5!]

[Many people are watching, so don't make a fool out of yourself.

Win the match!]

[Condition: Knock out or kill your opponents]

[Quest reward: 50 Exp]

[Failure: ???]

[Optional Quest received]

[Waste not want not]

[Consume the Altered]

[Quest reward: Additional stat points]

Subconsciously Gary licked his lips as he read over the message, yet he snapped out of it as soon as Hai shouted 'start!'.

Immediately, the challenger's feet started to transform, growing green in colour, making them look like that of an insect. Less than a second later, he pushed off, shooting from his position like a spring. The ground was kicked up and the dirt had hit one of the students behind.

'Haha, I bet you never expected this, my one-shot-kill. I'll take you out in a single hit and take your place!'

Even the three adults were surprised by this, since it had taken him a few seconds to transform his feet and hands previously. For a moment, Hai began to worry, for even a student in a stronger Altered form might have trouble dealing with such a surprise attack.

It was one of the reasons the three didn't simply host a battle royale. Sure, the challenger might win, but it was a cheap victory and not one that had to do with their potential. Nevertheless, since it was the potential admission to the AFA on the line, they couldn't blame him for using a cheap trick.

'Honorable Fight 0.5... only 50 EXP... it means I don't really have to worry about you.' Gary sighed internally, as he shifted his front foot, taking a fighting stance. He lifted his heel off the ground slightly and was on his toes, before getting his fist ready.

'You might think you're fast... but you're nothing but a snail compared to Kirk!'

Bouncing off his toes without transforming, Gary threw out his fist, landing right in his opponent's face. A loud crack resounded as the Insect Altered's jaw, and nose were shattered. Blood spilt backwards through the air, as he fell to the ground.

Gary just stood there looking down at his opponent with a bloody fist, happy to receive a free 50 EXP without the need to so much as transform and having defeated them with a single punch.

'He's on a different level.' Mr Wood thought.

Chapter 363: The final five

'The guy might have been an idiot, but that doesn't give me the right to kill him...' Gary thought to himself as he looked down on the unconscious body of the Insect Altered, who clearly wouldn't be

getting up anytime soon. As if taunting him to do it, the Optional Quest flashed before him, yet the Werewolf ignored it, shook the blood off his hand, and stepped back in line.

On some level, the teenager understood that the fastest way for him to grow in power through the Werewolf System would be by consuming beasts. However, since those were technically extinct, other than what NIRV was doing, he would have to eat Altered if he wanted the benefit, and that just wasn't something socially acceptable, nor was it something he really wanted to do.

Fortunately, that wasn't his only way to grow in power. Aside from levelling up, a task which became progressively more annoying due to the increased in EXP requirement each time, he could strengthen himself, or his Pack, through the use of Pawn Points.

Using one of them, he had evolved Kai into a Knight Grade Beta Werewolf. Gary still had no idea whether his upperclassman had simply been predestined to become a Werewolf, or whether his Alpha Bite had been the trigger, but the assigned Unique Class was something that had made even him jealous.

It was a good thing that Kai was on his side, and given his power boost, the green-haired teenager felt confident in using the ten Pawn Points he had earned as a bonus for successfully hunting the Underdogs on himself.

There were three things he could do with them. He could invest them towards reaching the next Grade, evolve his Pack members so that they would reach the Bishop Grade like him, or convert them into either Stat or Skill Points.

The first option seemed wasteful. Gary simply lacked the necessary Pawn Points to go up a Grade in one go. He needed to invest 14 more Pawn Points to do that, and no matter how much he racked his brain, he couldn't imagine that it made any difference whether he was 1/15 on the way, or 11/15.

The second option, while arguably more useful, also had its problem. Unlike him, neither Olivia nor Kai had any levels or stats. Even if they did, the Alpha Werewolf had yet to find a way to see them, so he would have no clue how much of an effect evolving them would have.

After the full moon, he knew for a fact that they were weaker than him, but Gary preferred not to take a risk in that regard. He didn't need either one challenging him for his position, as unlikely as that might be.

That only left the last option, the one that would strengthen him directly. After nearly dying to the Underdogs the teenager had grown aware that even as a Werewolf he had been far from invincible. He was sure that he could have beaten each member individually, but why would his enemies do him that favour when there was strength in numbers?

Of course, the same was true for him, and the Werewolf System had tempted him more than once to increase his Pack size, but he wasn't willing to turn his friends, at least not until he found a way to remove or at least severely decrease the risk of them dying.

[Name: Gary Dem]

[Class: Warrior]

[State: Human (Alpha)]

[Grade: Bishop]

[Level 20]

[Exp 478/5302]

[Health: 160 >>> 200]

[Energy: 278/300]

[Strength 25 >>> 27]

[Dexterity 24 >>> 26]

[Endurance 20 >>> 25]

Before coming here today, he had made sure to strengthen himself, maximising his chances to become a student at the AFA. Alas, ultimately, Gary ended up with a mere 13 Stat Points after the conversion. After half an hour of cursing the system with everything he could think of, the Alpha Werewolf had assigned his points.

‘If I had known that my competition was just at this level, I should have saved up those Pawn Points. Hopefully, the real students of the AFA have more to offer, though I suppose being able to climb to the AFC in record time should also have its perk.’

Honestly, the significant boost Gary had received after consuming Kirk had been enough to put him above his opponent. With his Dexterity even higher, the Werewolf was now at a level comparable to the Cheetah Altered. Of course, that was only true with regard to speed alone, skills wise was a completely different story.

Without Olivia’s interference, the fight would have ended differently, and since it had been televised, Gary intended to refrain from transforming completely while in the AFA, and perhaps even in the AFC, if he could help him. Although the Werewolf felt in control when transforming, there was something about that form that forced out his wild side.

‘Once I’m done with the assessments, it appears that I will need to have a word with the scout leader. His men have really failed us this year.’ Professor Humfree thought, looking at Gary. ‘Someone of his talent should have been brought before us with the scouted group, especially since he should place highly even among them.’

‘Not only is he great at controlling his transformation, but he was also able to precisely track a surprise attack, and used his opponent’s own force against him. A shame the fight ended so abruptly, I would have loved seeing his abilities more in depth, but the next test will be perfect for that.’

After two fights, none of the failed teenagers dared to challenge those who had passed, accepting their fate of having to apply to a different academy.

The twelve students that had passed followed the three professors into one of the academy buildings. Strangely, it was an empty hall, which lead to a long hallway, which eventually led to an even larger white empty room that had nothing inside.

“This is where the second test will take place.” Professor Humfree began to explain. “While it is remarkable that so many of you have met our standards, the AFA can only admit five of you. In a while, balls will start shooting toward you, you’re free to dodge or catch, however, the moment one of you comes into contact with a ball, we will enter the next phase.

“A 60-second timer will appear, and once it reaches zero, you will hear this sound.”

BZZZZ

“The last person who came into contact with that ball gets eliminated, starting a new round without that person. Any questions? No? Great! You have five minutes to talk amongst yourselves before the first round starts!”

With that, the three adults left the room. Gary was wondering why they would be given five minutes. The teenager was eager to play straight away and get it over with. However, once the timer started to count down, the Werewolf saw why they had been granted that time.

“Hey, do you want to team up with us? If there are five of us, and we agree not to hit the ball at each other, it means we will have a higher chance of passing on. We can work together to get the others out!” One of the teenagers suggested as he came up to him. It was one of the three who had been unable to transform.

As he was contemplating this offer, Gary noticed that once again, there was one individual who was being ignored by the others.

“Thanks for the offer, but I already have a team member, and I think just the two of us will do fine.” Gary apologised, as he headed towards Numba.

“How about we work together?” Gary smiled as he offered him his hand.

"No." Came the abrupt answer, without even the hint of hesitation.

"That's great, le- ... hang on, what did you just say?"

Chapter 364: Going solo

"I said that I'm not interested." Numba stated without much emotion, and as if to stress his point, the lone Altered moved away from Gary.

'Didn't we have a bro moment earlier? The two of us even smiled at each other... was that just me misinterpreting stuff?' Gary thought as his cheeks were turning red in embarrassment.

"Come on, don't you agree that with everyone else teaming up, we would be better off doing the same?" The Werewolf argued, completely aware how pathetic he must appear at that moment. Less than a minute ago, the green haired teenager had confidently refused an offer to join someone else's group, and now he was practically begging for a cooperation.

"I don't mean to say that I think you need any help necessarily, but working together would increase both our chances of passing the assessment and stuff."

Numba let out a sigh, before turning back to Gary. "I don't know if you're a good guy or bad guy, but that's kinda my point.

"All I know about you is that your Altered form looks impressive, and that you punched someone's face in a while ago. While it would be great to have that kind of power on my side, what exactly is stopping you from betraying me during this assessment? This is my only chance to get into the AFA, so I'm not going to take any chances.

"One thing I learned growing up is that you can rely on the fact that people will always do things for their own personal gain and benefit. Frankly, I don't see what you could possibly get out of working with me."

Gary wished to argue, but while his mouth remained open, no words were coming out. After all, what else could he say to Numba other than he should trust him? If their positions were reversed, would he be willing to completely trust the word of what amounted to basically a complete stranger?

Left with no other option, the Werewolf accepted his defeat and turned around. From the looks of it, he was one step too late. The other two teens who had been unable to transform had been more successful in securing teammates, making them a group of five. Additionally, four Altered capable of transforming were also staying grouped together.

‘Screw me, I guess. That’s what I get for trying to be nice. I should have just agreed to the guy’s offer. Oh well, no other choice but to do this whole thing on my own.’ Gary lamented.

“Erghh, excuse me, I couldn’t help but overhear what you were talking about with that guy, and I totally agree. Since he doesn’t wish to team up... would you mind if I take his place? I really want to get in the AFA, and you were super impressive.” A nasal voice interrupted Gary’s thoughts.

Before him stood a teenager with straight, flat hair that was cut on the level of his eyebrows, giving him the appearance of a bowl. Then there were his eyes that looked like upside down moons as he smiled.

“You... were the guy that could, like grow out his hair out, right? Turning into like a Hair Altered?” Gary questioned, as he tried to recall the teenager’s name. The next moment, he covered his mouth, realising how incredibly rude his description might have been. Fortunately, the teenager’s expression didn’t change in the least, rather nodding along.

“Yep, that’s me. You don’t seem to remember my name, but I don’t blame you, I’m as surprised as you’re that I actually passed. I’m Vik, and it would be my pleasure to work alongside you.”

Truth be told, Gary couldn’t join his enthusiasm, from what he barely recalled, he couldn’t imagine the guy becoming anything but a burden, but after getting rejected he also felt bad for him. “Are you sure you wouldn’t rather join up with the group of four? Together, you might have a far better chance.”

“What’s the point? I’m convinced you’ll end up as one of the last five. But even if they change their mind and allow me to join, if it comes down to it, I’ll be the one they’ll abandon in the last round. My gut is telling me that my best chance is sticking with you.” The teenagers admitted with a smile as he rubbed the back of his head.

Gary wasn't sure if it was due to pity, or him appreciating Vik's honesty, but with barely any time left on the timer he agreed. The lights near the ceiling of the room turned on as soon as the buzzer sounded. Behind the glass, they could see the three silhouettes.

"Time's up. We hope you've agreed on your tactics to pass the assessment. Heads up, the first ball will shoot out momentarily."

BEEP

Like a silent agreement, the room had been split up into four parts, each one belonging to one of the groups. The side of the white room door opened up, and what looked like a slick cannon had shot out a football sized black ball towards them.

The panel that had opened was right behind Gary, and since he had heard the sound of the panel opening, he had instantly moved away from his position. Alas, from the corner of his eye, he could see that his new teammate would be hit unless he moved. A loud bang went off, and the Werewolf was barely able to pull Vik by his shirt, saving him from the impact.

The ball passed them by at incredible speed, faster than a pitcher's. It looked to be going around 100 miles per hour. The next second, it had hit one of the teenagers that were in the group of five, bouncing off his body.

"Alright, the count-down will now begin!" A voice was heard over the megaphone.

"Hey I was hit, I was hit, what are we going to do!" The teenager panicked as he looked for help from his teammates.

"There are no rules about what we can do, so let's grab one of the others, and hold them down!" The leader from the group of five suggested.

Immediately, one of the teenagers who had fought before who didn't have the ability to transform, ran over to the others and grabbed a teenager before they could react. His teammates were a little scared to attack him, as they had seen what he had done in the fight outside as well.

Kicking the other teenager in the head, he quickly dazed him and grabbed the back of his arms.

“Throw the ball!” The teenager demanded.

He didn’t need to be asked twice, and the ball was thrown, hitting the teenager right in the stomach. Underneath the large timer that was in the room, a photo could be seen of the person who had last come into contact with the ball.

Now the timer was at forty seconds.

The group of five split up now as they tried to get away from the other group of four and seeing as it would be difficult to help out their fires, their eyes had now turned to the one who was on his own.

‘I see how it is, well just try it.’ Numba thought as he started to transform.

Chapter 365: Explosive power

Unlike during the initial assessment, when Numba had been struggling to transform, his horns were now growing at a fast speed, swirling backwards just past his entire head before they curved up. The pointed bits stuck out around fifteen centimetres in front of him. The ball was heading his way, yet when he kicked the floor, a loud bang resounded throughout the room.

The teenager only moved a short distance, less than two metres, but his speed was incredibly fast, powerful, not to mention timed perfectly. The Goat Altered’s horns connected with the ball, which flew back as fast as a bullet, right past the closest two teenagers from the group of four, until it finally collided with its target.

It was surprising that the ball itself didn’t break, indicating that the material wasn’t normal rubber. It was far more durable, yet it also kept a solid state when being hit, allowing it to retain an optimal speed and weight behind it.

Numba, aware that his chances of fighting off four Altered weren’t good, had wisely decided to make a fight amongst themselves pointless by forcing the group of five to act. What’s more, his target had been caught off guard against this sudden ambush. With the ball hitting him right in his stomach, the teenager

was currently down on his knees. It felt like no matter how hard he tried to breathe, he just couldn't, to the point that tears were coming out of his eyes.

"Grab the ball, we have to make sure that Tick isn't the one to get eliminated this round! With him gone, we won't have the numbers advantage any more!" A sixteen-year-old girl by the name of Izzy was shouting that. Just like Tick, she was one of the three Altered unable to transform.

Immediately, the short brown haired student who had displayed his skills in the fight against the Crab Altered ran towards Numba. His goal was to knock out the Goat Altered. After all, the only rule was that the last one to come into contact with the ball would be eliminated, and an unconscious person would be unable to do anything after being tagged.

Five minutes had been more than enough time to form teams, so the two groups had used the remaining time to coordinate how they could best compliment each other given their respective Altered forms and skills.

'If it's just him, I might be able to defend myself until the timer reaches zero.' Numba thought, ready to fight since the group of four had already escaped from the vicinity.

"You can do it, Ian!" Izzy shouted from behind. All three of them had attended the same school, and Ian was undoubtedly the strongest amongst them. Fortunately for the trio, the Crab Altered had challenged Ian, rather than Izzy or Tick, which had led to the misconception that all three of the Altered unable to transform had to be some sort of powerhouse. Alas, with Numba hitting Tick, their friend was on the verge of losing his chance to attend the AFA, especially with only ten seconds left this round.

Just as Numba was about to prepare his legs to push off again, he saw that another figure was running towards Ian. It looked like a blur, but the figure met the brown haired Altered who had been mid-kick in the air.

"What the hell?! This fight should have nothing to do with you! Fine, if this is how you want to play it, then let's go!" Ian cried out as Gary caught his foot.

"Numba might have rejected my offer, but I'm not going to just stand there and watch when all of you are ganging up on him." Gary explained with a confident smile. He clenched his right hand, holding onto

the leg harder. Then, seeing how Ian was about to kick him with his free leg, the Werewolf prepared to meet the incoming kick with one of his own.

Alas, that kick never came. Instead, a cracking sound could be heard, and the next moment, a terrifying scream filled the floor. The scene looked gruesome. Not only was Ian's leg twisted into an unnatural position, but a small part of his bone was sticking out of the body.

"SHIT! I'm so sorry." Gary apologised the moment he saw the damage he had caused. He had intended to merely use a simple kick, but having seen how Ian had fared against the Crab Altered, Gary had opted to use a bit more strength and speed to overwhelm the other teenager's defence. He had succeeded... a little too well.

"Hmm, I didn't think that they would go at it with such enthusiasm from the get-go. Should I call in the medics, so that they can collect him?" Professor Hai asked his colleagues.

"There's no need. He's an Altered, and according to his blood test a very powerful one at that. This type of injury is not enough to kill him, so we should let him decide whether he wishes to forfeit or continue." Professor Humfree replied.

None of the teenagers knew what to do at that moment. Their reverie was broken by the buzzer that had gone off. The image of the last student who had been hit was now flashing under the timer.

"Tick Mybal has been the last person to come in contact with the ball and is thereby eliminated from this assessment. Please leave the area." The voice of Professor Humfree stated over the speaker.

In the room, another panel opened up, revealing a door. The teenager walked towards it, his head held down. He hadn't fully recovered yet, but enough to be able to walk on his own. The boy could do nothing but blame himself for not having been more cautious. Still, as someone whose Altered form had been deemed interesting enough to allow him to pass the AFA's first assessment, the silver lining for Tick was that other academies would be happy to take him in.

As soon as the teenage boy had left the room, another beep was heard. Everyone had expected new balls to come flying, yet nothing of the sort happened. Instead, the sixty-second timer had started counting down, showing a picture of Numba underneath.

Immediately, a feeling of relief overcame the others. All they had to do now was make sure not to get hit, and after having seen what Numba was capable of, they were very wary of him. Meanwhile, the Goat Altered ran towards the ball and lifted it off the floor, he then threw it slightly up in the air, as if he was going to do a tennis serve.

While the ball was dropping down, Numba readied his legs and, once again, explosively charged forward, hitting the ball with his head. It flew across again, this time hitting one of the group of four Altered on the shoulder.

“Crap, let's just go for others, our numbers are the same now, so we should be able to get one of them!” One among the group suggested.

For Gary, and his teammate, the second round became calm and peaceful. The two teams of four were fighting against each other, the image under the timer changing every other second. The timer continued to go down, and in the end, there were only ten seconds left until the next person would be eliminated.

Currently, Izzy was the one holding the ball. The teenage girl was bruised and tired, yet her face showed conviction as she changed her approach, running towards Gary.

‘Why me? Do you want to take revenge for your boyfriend or something?’ Gary wondered, as he just watched her. The green haired teenager was ready to dodge. He had contemplated hitting the ball to return it, yet he had decided against it, fearing that she too might turn out even more fragile than Ian.

The countdown continued and now a few metres away, Izzy hurled the ball. It was fast, faster than what a human could do, but nowhere near fast enough to hit Gary and in fact he could tell that the trajectory of the ball was off, to the point that he didn’t even have to move.

'I can see that this is a desperate attempt, but you still have to at least aim properly.' Gary thought, a small grin on his face. Just in case, it turned out to be a curveball, he stepped to the side, making the ball miss him completely.

Keeping his eye on the screen, Gary saw something strange. The image had changed, now displaying Vik.

'Crap, I completely forgot about him!'

Turning his head behind him, Gary was going to try to help his teammate in some way.

'I don't really care about this guy, but he came to me and trusted me, and if I was to fail here, I might fail elsewhere as well!' Images on the Howlers members appeared in Gary's head.

But when turning around, all he could see was the ball bounce off his chest and fall to the floor.

Off in the distance, he could see Vik, his moon shaped eyes smiling at the Werewolf's visible confusion.

Chapter 366: Three Seconds

There were only three seconds left in this round, and currently, Gary's image was being displayed underneath the timer.

'Who would have thought that the most talented kid from this batch would lose due to trickery.' Professor Humfree thought as he was scratching his beard. 'It's truly a shame, but this should serve as a lesson for him. No matter how strong you might be, you can always lose your life if you put your trust in the wrong person.'

Tests like this one were designed with treachery in mind. Just like in the real world, each trial taker could merely control their own actions. As such, they would either have to make sure to put their trust in the right person, convince the others to work together with them or try to do everything on their own. After all, life in the AFA would be brutal. If you couldn't make it past this stage, then only a life of hardships would await you.

Gary's eyes turned red as he continued to stare at Vik. The teenager with the bowl cut had seemed so innocent when he had asked the Werewolf to help him out. Gary had actually been willing to help him pass this assessment since Vik had been so upfront with his request, but after this betrayal, he understood the situation for what it really was.

'... this BASTARD came over to me, just so he could stab me in the back!!! I should have realised that something was up when the others didn't let him join their teams. Numba was right...'

Unfortunately, the Werewolf's realisation came a bit too late. Although Gary was faster than Vik, with the Altered already being a distance away and with just three seconds on the clock, it wasn't enough time to change the situation.

"Wolfboy, kick the ball!!!" A voice shouted.

Numba was closing the distance between him and Vik and grabbed him by the arms, holding him in place. The traitor had been unable to react as his attention had been fully focused on Gary, afraid that the Werewolf had some more tricks up his sleeve.

Looking down, the ball was right in front of Gary. Two seconds were left, so the green haired teenager did the only thing he could do to close this distance in this short time period. Without caring for his clothes, he activated Controlled Transformation on his legs. The muscles on his calves grew in size, and he even left an indenture on the floor as he kicked himself off.

With one step, Gary was next to the ball. Now one second was left on the timer. The Werewolf had focused most of his transformation on the foot he would use to kick. His brand-new shoe exploded as large and long toenails stuck out, revealing the fur growing up.

'I'm getting into the academy no matter what!' Gary thought to himself, disregarding the damage he might cause to Vik.

His foot made contact with the ball, and it looked as if it was being pushed into itself for a second before it blasted through the air. A black blur was seen and the next second a loud slap could be heard.

Numba flinched as the impact made him slide a few meters back. However, Vik was far worse off. The teenager had been mid-transformation, attempting to use his hair to block, or at least partially deflect, the incoming projectile, yet he had been unsuccessful.

The Goat Altered, noticing that Vik had gone limp in his arms, let go of him. The Hair Altered dropped head first to the floor, blood pouring from his mouth and nose. A large imprint of the ball was left on his face.

'Holy shit... just how much power did that kick pack?' Numba wondered. '... the speed of that kick was even faster than my headbutt... has Wolfboy been holding back this entire time?'

Beep

The buzzer went off. Quickly turning his head, Gary needed to find out whether his desperate attempt had made it in time. An image appeared on the screen and an announcement was made.

"Vik Scissor has been the last person to come in contact with the ball and is thereby eliminated from this assessment. Since he is unable to move on his own, someone will come to collect him in a moment. The assessment will continue after that."

This was music to Gary's ears. He had been confident in his ability to pass this assessment without struggling against anyone in the room. After all, these were just applicants, and they weren't even the ones that were scouted.

Since this was a bit of a break, the Werewolf headed over to the Goat Altered. "Thank you... thank you very much for helping me out. If it weren't for you, then I would have been eliminated. I really, really owe you one."

Numba looked at Gary's face, then down to his feet that looked human again.

"I told you that you shouldn't trust just anyone, especially those that you have just met, but you didn't listen." The teenager sighed. "Don't mention it, I was just repaying you for taking out the other guy. Let's just say we're even."

“No way!” Gary replied straight away. “I just helped them not gang up on you, but you seriously saved me out there. I would have been eliminated without your intervention. Not just beaten up or kicked to the head, and besides, someone with your skills should have been able to at least evade the guy until the timer went down.

“So yeah, I owe you. Unfortunately, I don’t really have something I can give you right now, so how about you get a, ummm... let’s call it Gary token. Yeah! Whatever you need, whenever you need it, I’ll help you out, no questions asked, alright?”

Numba didn't know what to do. He wasn't used to being around such an upbeat person, though truth be told, Gary wasn't normally this hyped either, but something about the whole atmosphere of the AFA had led to his current mood.

“Fine.” Numba shrugged. “I don’t know when I would use it. Let’s make sure that we both pass first, and maybe after we’re both official AFA students, I will get back to you about that favour.”

The panel to the door eventually opened up, and a person they hadn't seen before entered. It was a middle-aged man, wearing a tight fit shirt that showed off his muscles. His piercing gaze checked over each of the teenagers before he found Vik lying on the floor. With a straight gait, he came over to pick up the unconscious Altered, lifting him up with a single arm.

“That was a nice kick.” The man said on the way back, as he passed Gary. “I look forward to seeing you inside the academy. Make sure to learn from this opportunity.” And with that, he left the room.

‘The feeling he gave off...he was someone who was more suited for me to go up against than the ones here.’ Gary smiled, his blood pumping. He didn’t know what position that man held inside the AFA, but he was looking forward to meeting him again.

In the past, Gary’s mind had been filled with all kinds of thoughts concerning his family, his school life, or the Underdogs among other things. Before he got turned into a Werewolf he had never realised how much he truly enjoyed fighting. Sure, part of him had watched those Altered fights with a dream of becoming as rich as them, yet now part of him wanted to prove that he was better than any of them.

— —

"You look relieved." Professor Hai noted with a chuckle, his belly moving up and down.

"Of course. If he had lost, I had even contemplated asking the director to make an exception for the kid." Professor Wood replied honestly. "There is a lot more to him than meets the eye. I believe that we may have the next Kirk Summerfield on our hands, perhaps even better."

He started to chuckle to himself, which made his colleague wonder if he was all there in the head.

"Really? You rate him that highly?" Professor Humfree asked, now intrigued. "It appears you know something that we don't. I would ask you to elaborate, but it should be more interesting to watch him prove himself even more. Hopefully, he has learned from his mistake."

— —

BEEP

"The next round has begun." The speaker announced, and the picture that appeared was Gary's once more. The ball was right next to his feet, a circumstance that made everyone else nervous.

"It looks like your plan failed, eh? Were you also the one to come up with this plan?" Gary asked, looking at Izzy.

Turning to her left and right, the teenage girl found herself isolated from the rest.

"Hey... hey, what happened to us being a team? Didn't we agree to work together!" Izzy shouted at her former teammates.

"I think you have other things to worry about." Gary smiled, cracking his knuckles. "You see, my plan was actually to remain on the sideline and let you sort it out amongst yourselves who deserved a place in the AFA. I thought it would be fairer for everyone that way. However, what you just did REALLY pissed me off!"

Pulling up his sleeves, Gary used Controlled Transformation on his arm. His forearms grew larger, his nails gripped tightly around the ball, and his brown fur could be seen all over.

"Now, let me personally take you and your whole group out!" Gary said as he sprinted across the floor.

'This seems like the perfect opportunity to test out that new skill I got a while ago. Let's see if I can end this whole assessment in this round!'

Chapter 367: A special Howl

Unlike a few moments ago, Gary kept his legs normal and only transformed his hand. Still, even without transforming, Gary was much faster than those taking the assessment, at least before they had transformed into their Altered forms.

Before Izzy could make up her mind about what to do, Gary was in front of her. He raised his fur hand above her, holding the ball.

"Catch." Gary dropped the ball, and Izzy held onto it as she was told. The image on the screen had now changed to hers, but she didn't care about that.

Looking at Ian lying on the ground with his broken legs, she could only imagine what would happen to her. But, on the other hand, Gary hadn't even transformed back then, nor was he angry.

"For the next few seconds, just hold the ball for me, or you know what, hold it as long as you can."

Then raising his head, Gary stared at her teammates. He suspected they were all in on the plan together, and there wasn't just one person to blame for all of this.

Noticing his gaze, the teammates started running away, acting as if Gary was the ball himself.

'Let's see how this thing works.'

[You have used Magnetic Howl.]

It was the first time Gary had used this skill, at least in a fighting situation like this. Before, he had used this skill in his regular practices, but it didn't seem quite spectacular. However, he believed that things might change for him this time.

In the next moment, Gary suddenly felt like he was choking, and it was as if something was happening to his throat as if it was changing. Soon, his larynx was no longer like a normal human. Once the skill completed the transformation, he looked up at the sky and then when he opened his mouth, a loud howl resounded throughout the area.

"AWHOOO!"

It wasn't short either. Instead, it was a loud one that seemed to bounce off the walls and create echoes, amplifying the howl. It wasn't the strangest thing for the others to see, especially since Gary had revealed himself to be a Wolf Altered.

After hearing this howl, the students running in the opposite direction turned around and started to head straight towards Gary. It was as if they couldn't control their body and were naturally moving toward him.

"What is going on?!" Most students panicked. Their bodies couldn't stop themselves from running at Gary.

"It looks like it worked." Gary smiled.

He had already taken a fighting stance, ready to kick with his legs.

As soon as the first student got close to him, he threw it out fast, kicking the latter right in the side, and possibly breaking a rib. Then, he threw a fist at another student near him, hitting the him right on the face and sending him stumbling back.

By now, the other students who realised they had no control over what they wanted to do, had decided to try their best to at least attack. They couldn't entirely control where they were going but could control their body to some degree.

However, they had failed to note Gary's transformed hands, which had claws on them.

"This might sting a little bit, but I'm sure you bastards have experienced a bit of pain before!" Gary enunciated.

Seeing the claws made the incoming students' fists freeze, and they instead focused on doing anything they could to avoid the incoming attack. However, Gary never planned to hurt them seriously to begin with, so instead, he just used this opportunity to take advantage of their stupor to send them flying with his kicks or punch and slap across their face, before turning his hands back to normal.

The one-sided beating didn't take long before he had knocked out four more students. As for the others, they no longer felt like they were being pulled toward Gary, but they didn't want to come any closer.

'That skill was quite useful for a situation like this, but if I was going up against the Underdogs, I can see how I wouldn't want to use it.'

The System unlocked the Magnetic Howl Skill as a reward after defeating Kirk. However, based on the description, he knew he wouldn't be able to use it for most of his battles because this skill was an agro type.

According to the description, it made the enemies around him focus their attack on him. No matter who they were fighting against or what they were doing, they would choose to come toward him and attack him. However, the skill stated that it would work longer on particular types of individuals and less on others.

This skill was also why Gary wanted to continue raising his Health and Energy. Because he wanted to become a tank character who could take on all his own gang's enemies, and at the same time, in a desperate situation, this skill combined with Last stand could work well.

The only drawback here was the skill had a ten-minute cooldown and took up to 25 points of energy which was quite a large amount. Of course, Gary would not become a pure tank, but there were other ways for him to improve his stats.

[Exp 2788/5302]

'I got quite a bit of exp for beating those guys, even though the Underdogs seemed like a harder lot to deal with. Is it because they're Altered? And that damned notification kept telling me to devour them for extra stat points.' Gary thought before turning his attention towards Izzy.

"Thank you for holding the ball all this time." Gary smiled at her, whose legs were practically shaking. There was no doubt in her mind that if she threw the ball, she would pay for it dearly, and by then, the buzzer had gone off.

Looking at the timer, Gary found it strange. It had stopped with five seconds to spare. In fact, it was as if someone paused the machine to halt the timer.

"Due to an unexpected turn of events, we have had to pause the assessment. So, Can all the able students head towards the exit that will soon open up in the room?"

— —

On the top floor, where the three professors were watching the whole thing, Humfree shook his head.

"Well, this has become quite a headache!"

— —

Soon, all of the students had gathered in a single waiting room. It looked like it was a practice room for fighters of some sort. The room was quite old, and there were even spots on the walls which were used as punching targets by the fighters.

Meanwhile, the professors were in a meeting room, although it wasn't just three of them. There was a room full of around ten other teachers there as well, and they were all here to assess the situation and make a decision on the next step.

Just then, Humfrey pressed a button and turned off the TV.

"As you can see, that is how the assessment has gone so far, which is why it has come to this," Humfree explained. "Usually, this assessment has worked out for us, and it has done for years, but if we had let things continue, then those who passed and failed would have been dictated by a single person.

"A few talented students would have failed this assessment before we even went through the rounds, which is why I have called all of you to decide who will go through to the next assessment."

Mr Wood handed out papers from a file he had created for all teachers to see. This way, they could fully assess who would be best. They were also to consider the video they had seen, so they weren't just basing their judgement on paper.

"I'm sorry I can't really focus." Miss White, a teacher who had her hair tied up in a bun and glasses on her face. She was one of the teachers who focused on more of the theory lessons in the class. "I just keep thinking, how was a student like that not scouted by our academy?"

"Don't we have scouts in every city to keep an eye out for such talents so a situation like this doesn't happen?"

A lot of the teachers there thought the same thing. It was clear Gary was just as good as their scouted students this year.

"I'll answer that," Someone spoke up instead of the Professors. He was Gabe, a teacher dressed in a military-style uniform with a large cut over one of his eyes. He was also older than the other teachers but not as much as the professors. "The boy hails from a tier-three city. Although we kept track of all Alters in each city, this one didn't get on our radar.

"It seems like he is being backed by a group that suddenly rose in his city. This rarely happens, which is why we missed this one."

It was a simple explanation but a rare one. An uprising in power hardly happened. A change in management from a city gang taking over another was common, but not a single person had heard of the Howlers group before.

After Teacher Gabe cleared that up, the teachers and the professors spent the next few minutes deciding who would pass the test.

"Well, there is only one thing left to do before we end this meeting. Professor Humfrey sighed, "We need to decide what we should do with Gary Dem."

Chapter 368: The Final five?

While the professors were busy discussing what to do, a few helpers had come in, and had brought in a few benches for the waiting teenagers to sit on, while they moved the injured to another room. After receiving treatment, they returned and joined the others.

Right now, the Werewolf was sitting on a bench of his own, since the other teenagers had all chosen to distance themselves from him. Ironically, some had taken the initiative to go and talk to Numba, pretending as if they hadn't treated the Goat Altered like an outcast. Of course, he hadn't forgotten, nor forgiven them for the fact that they had tried to gang up on him in the first round, so with his arms folded he was simply ignoring them.

At one point, Gary stood up to stretch, which made everyone else immediately flinch, clearly afraid of him. "I only attacked you due to the assessment. I'm not normally that aggressive." The green haired teenager mumbled as he looked away from them awkwardly.

'I didn't exactly come here to make friends, but they could at least try and hide their disdain towards me.' Gary thought as he let out a small sigh. 'I admit that I might have gone a little too far back there, but I only overreacted because their plan to eliminate me nearly worked.'

This awkward atmosphere continued until the three professors eventually entered the room.

"We won't waste your time any longer, so I shall proceed by reading out the list of students that have successfully passed. Please note that due to the 'unforeseen circumstances' we've come to the decision by taking into account everything you've shown so far in this assessment and the previous one."

Everyone became nervous and tense, as they had no clue who had passed and failed. Chances were that the ones that had been knocked out before Gary had gone on his small rampage were non-contestants, but as for the rest, it was anyone's guess.

"In no particular order, Gary Dem."

The first name came as no surprise, as all of them agreed that the Werewolf had proven himself vastly superior to the rest in every way. The real question was who the other four lucky teenagers were.

"Numba Cardenez!"

Another one who had shown great skill during the ball game. Many expected this as well, though all but him and Gary had secretly hoped that the professors might not see his potential.

"Ian Noblitt!"

There were gasps from the students as they heard this name. After all, not only was he one of the Altered unable to transform, but his confrontation with Gary had led to him having a large cast over his leg that would likely take a long while to heal.

Some students looked like they were about to argue, yet Professor Hai gave them a stern look, shutting them down instantly. In the end, they had no choice but to accept the fact that his potential had to be high enough to warrant this decision, especially if one took into account his display of strength against the Crab Altered.

If it wasn't for Gary, then he might have had a great chance to pass this and any future assessment. It was at this point that the other students were starting to lose hope. They now felt like everything would be based on their file, what background they perhaps had, and they all knew that their backgrounds were lacking, or else they would have been invited.

"Izzy Shamone!" Professor Humfree called out.

“Wait... me?!” Izzy stood up, pointing to herself. The teenage girl was in disbelief, she hadn’t done much in the ball game, her background wasn’t the best, so why had she been picked? Overjoyed with the decision, she didn’t even notice that tears were rolling down her face.

“That is the result of our decision. These four students have passed and will be moving on from here. Everyone else, we thank you for your interest in applying to the AFA, and we hope you’ll have a bright future elsewhere.”

It was then that all the students stood up, from where they were. They wanted to complain, but before they could the three professors were heading out of the room, telling those that had passed to follow them.

“That’s just four! What about the fifth student?!” One of the students shouted.

Without turning around, Professor Humfree reminded him. “I did indeed state that we have five places, but I’ve also been upfront about the fact that I did not believe that five people would pass. It’s already quite surprising that four places have been filled, and as for the rest of you, blame yourself for lacking the necessary talent to impress us.”

— —

Gary and the other three felt a little bad, yet this feeling paled in comparison to their joy of getting to be students of the AFA. Out of around one hundred teenagers, only four of them had succeeded.

However, rather than walk over to the main building, the three adults were leading them off campus. They were quite surprised when they saw a bus, which they boarded, but since they had been told to follow, all of them did so silently.

Fortunately, their destination wasn’t too far from the academy buildings. There was an air around the professors that just told the group of teenagers that it was best to not question them. Eventually, they reached another large building. There was no glass on the outside, so it was impossible to tell what was inside.

One thing was clear though, it was huge and looked almost like another academy, just here on its own. While standing outside, the students were told to line up and each one of them was handed a badge.

“Some of you might have thought that you already made it, but those two assessments have merely proven that you deserve to have come here.” Professor Hai explained. “This is the first step into entering the REAL academy.”

At that moment, numbers appeared on each of their badges. Gary’s showed the number 120, Numba’s 121, Ian’s 122 and Izzy’s 123.

“Inside that building, the number on your badges will dictate how pleasant your stay will be. It decides many things such as what room you’ll sleep in, what meals you will receive, though most importantly, only those who manage to retain their place in the top 10 for at least one week may join the AFA.”

Although it wasn’t quite what Gary was expecting, for the first time he felt like he was actually going to be part of the AFA, and with his badge it made him realise that he might be one step closer to meeting Xin again.

Chapter 369: A situation

Professor Hai went on to explain what their life would be like, and how they could rise through the ranks, be it in the form of passing the assessments, challenges, or through fighting against other students. He also explained how there would be teachers inside but no lessons, since those were there just to observe and nothing else. Still, they would have the facility to train as they wished, and higher numbers meant access to better facilities to train in order to encourage students to improve.

“You will be able to leave whenever you wish, but if you do choose to leave as someone outside the top 10, then that means you will forfeit your only chance to join the AFA. It’s in your own interest to do whatever it takes to reach the top positions, and hopefully, I will see you all at the real academy again. Once you enter, that will be the start of your next step.”

Before the adults left, Professor Humfree looked at Gary, and he had a few more words that were mainly directed at him.

“Although you’ve disrupted our assessment, your talent is undeniable. It’s hard to say how much you’ve yet to show us, but from what we’ve seen, we have a good idea of what you can do.

“Honestly, some teachers even suggested that it might be best if you just went and joined the academy immediately. Ultimately, however, we all agreed that this next part is also something that is akin to a rite of passage that everyone had to go through.

“That building is filled with students who have been scouted. Students that are just as talented as you, yet for one reason or another, they never got to rise to the top ten. There will be things you have never experienced, and because of your position, it might even affect matters in the outside world.

“Gary Dem, stay strong, and I hope you make it through this.”

With that said, the professors got on the bus, leaving the four students in front of the stadium-like building.

‘What did he mean by that? “The actions in here could affect outside”...’ Gary didn't know what to expect, but he did have one thought. Xin had only recently become an Altered, and according to Professor Hai, it wasn't uncommon for the ones inside to stay there for months, if not years. As such, there was a very good chance he would meet her inside.

Looking forward to the possible reunion, Gary was the first to take a step forward, heading towards the door. The others, not wanting to be left behind, followed after him. Although they were still worried about the harshness of what awaited them, they knew that there was no way back now.

‘There might be groups, factions that have agreed to work together inside this place, so they can get into the top ten.’ Izzy realised. ‘And what the professor said. Are students using their connections on the outside to secure their positions inside this place? If that's the case, us non-scouted students might have the toughest time in securing higher positions.’

As soon as the four of them entered, everyone turned their heads their way. The students inside had already been informed that today would be the day that newcomers might arrive, so now was the time to size up their new competition.

Looking around the large room, Gary was unable to find Xin.

'Is she perhaps training right now? I doubt it... I'm certain that Xin wouldn't just give up, so it should mean that she has already passed on from this place. So much for surprising her... oh well, I bet she will be even more surprised once we meet inside the AFA.' The Werewolf let out a depressed sigh.

Walking together as a group, the others continued to stare at them. None of them looked too friendly at the newcomers, and nobody introduced themselves either. Unsure what to do, Gary followed a sign which pointed to the personal rooms, until he arrived in front of his.

"They expect us to stay in this!" Izzy couldn't help but complain. "This is supposed to be one of the top academies in the world. They have money coming out of their backside, yet they expect some of the richest, most powerful people to stay in this type of shithole?! I've seen closet rooms with more class!!!"

Ian too was displeased about it, as he covered his nose with his shirt. There was a certain smell that seemed to emanate from the rooms. However, neither Gary nor Numba said a word about it. They simply put the belongings they brought inside, such as some change of clothes and a few personal items, down in their room. With no bed or drawers, they could only place it on the floor.

After everyone settled into their rooms a little, Izzy knocked on the boys' doors, asking them to meet outside. They stood by the handrail, looking down at all the students.

"First, I just want to say that I'm sorry for what happened during the assessment. I'm not as good as any of you three, so I did whatever I had to do to make sure I might be able to get this spot." Izzy began with an apology, looking straight at Gary since she had done him over the worst.

"I don't expect you to forgive me outright, but I hope you can at least listen to what I have to say. Placing in the top 10 is the only way for us to move on to the real AFA, and from what we've been told, it seems nearly impossible to do that on our own. As such, I propose that we stick together as a group.

"We're the new guys here, so there is a good chance there will be some people that will take advantage of that. Everyone else should already know that we're the ones who weren't scouted. They most likely see us as easy targets, the bottom of the barrel. So for now, why don't we have a truce and try to help each other out in this place?"

Hearing this, almost immediately, Numba decided to walk away. "That's a great speech and all, but this guy already knows that I don't trust people."

Ian just nodded. Unlike the others, he was already friends with Izzy, so he instantly agreed with her. Gary was still hesitating. Part of him was still pissed at her for what she had done, but another part also understood her reasoning, and now that they were all here together, it might not be the worst idea, but...

"I think it might be a better idea if you don't team up with me. There is a good chance that I could cause some trouble here." Gary smiled.

A buzzer went off while the group were in the middle of their discussion, and an announcement was made.

"Everyone, please head to the canteen for lunch. Newcomers, make sure to sit down according to the numbered seats!"

Over a hundred teenagers moved in one direction, so the four newcomers just followed behind them. Inside the canteen, Gary tried once more to find Xin, but once again she was nowhere to be found.

A delicious smell wafted into his nose, and his stomach let out a grumble. He could see that one of the tables was far more luxurious compared to the others. It was the one reserved for the top students, who were being served first. They had actual waiters dining them and the students were able to select whatever food they wished, which was cooked and delivered to them, most likely by professional chefs.

"Well, at least the food is good at this place," Gary commented, though he soon realised that he had spoken too soon.

Just like other areas, the canteen had separate sections depending on one's rank. The table for Gary and his group was all the way in the back, pretty much an old picnic table. Sitting down, the green haired teenager picked up the bowl of lukewarm chicken soup and took a sip.

[2 points of Energy have been restored]

[208/300 Energy]

'This isn't good... if I don't get a decent meal, I won't be able to fill up my Energy. The more I fight, the less Energy I will have at my disposal.' Gary realised.

Chapter 370: Your Background (part 1)

With all the food being controlled by the facility, money was practically worthless inside this part of the academy. From what Gary could see, the only way to get access to better things was to increase one's rank.

'If this is the level of food we receive for each meal, I'm going to lose Energy throughout my stay!' Gary thought, cursing the high metabolism rate of his Werewolf body. 'Should I try and fight off one of the high-ranking guys straight away while my Energy is at its highest?

Looking around, Gary's table wasn't the only one with only chicken soup. The same held true all the way to the table with rank 101 sitting on it. Still, the treatment for those ranked 100-76 wasn't that much better. Those students were sitting at a normal table, on actual chairs, with their meal consisting of a bigger portion of the soup, with a few simple side dishes added to them.

Rank 50 was the point when the meal started to look decent, with a big serving of curry with various side dishes, though there was a significant improvement from 25 upwards. Just looking at the food at those tables, the green haired teenager felt his mouth start to salivate.

'I should probably avoid making a ruckus on the first day. My gut is telling me that Professor didn't warn me just for fun. Unlike me, these guys must be the ones who had been scouted, and I have no idea how long they've already been here. If I pick the wrong target, I might just waste my Energy, which will just further decrease my chances of improving my current situation.

'Alright, I guess I should try to get a feeling as to how strong those ranked higher than me are, and just rank up to the point where the food is more adequate before I try something more crazy.'

With the next full moon weeks away, and him still having over 200 Energy, he felt confident that he had at least two to three days of leeway. That should be more than enough time to find a good target to challenge. Of course, if somebody were to challenge him before that, he would defend himself.

“Bleargh, this tastes horrible.” Ian spat the soup out the moment he tasted it. Izzy too showed an appalling reaction to its taste. Gary and Numba were the only ones at their table that had finished it without a single complaint.

‘I nearly forgot, everyone, is a rich kid here. I might be sitting next to the poorest rich kids, but those two are spoiled.’

Seeing the leftover food, Gary licked his lips, desperate times called for desperate measures.

“Hey, if you guys aren’t going to eat that, do you mind if I have it?” The Werewolf asked.

“Erm, are you sure you want the food even after I spat it back out?” Ian asked cautiously, thinking the act was a bit disgusting. However, Gary didn’t care, he just casually slurped up Ian’s bowl, as well as Izzy’s who had shoved her portion over to him.

[2 points of Energy have been restored] x2

[212/300 Energy]

“Say, do we get any other food, or is this all we get for breakfast, lunch and dinner?” Ian asked the table in front of theirs. Since they were ranked at the bottom, he wasn’t too afraid of them. The one he asked looked a little hurt and bruised up, as if he had just gotten out of a fight.

“This is all we get.” The student replied, pointing at the empty bowl of soup. “If you want my advice, you should just get used to it. Trust me, soon enough you will be enjoying every last drop of it. If you want to get better food, you’ll need to either beat someone higher ranked than you, or you need to show off in the weekly challenge. Neither option is really feasible on an empty stomach.

“Alternatively, if you have something substantial to offer, you can always try to strike a deal with someone.”

The student pointed to one of the other tables. A teenage boy with 86 on his badge walked over to one of the tables in the 26-50 range. The others could only see what they were doing, but with a small usage of Controlled Transformation on his ears, Gary was able to eavesdrop on their conversation.

“Alright, you win, if you agree, I’ll tell the Moro Family to lower the percentage of protection money from your family by ten percent. Deal?”

The other student nodded, before the two of them swapped food. The others on that table weren’t in the least bit surprised, indicating that this wasn’t anything unusual in there.

‘The Moro Family... sounds like they’re a gang. Is this what Professor Humfree meant? So much for all of us being equal in this place...’

Lunch had come to an end, and most of the students returned to the main room, which was apparently the place the Altered used to socialise. There were also several doors, which was where others slept as well.

Either way, it was a large place that had seats, places for people to read and just relax. While in the centre, it looked just like an ordinary circle, though people seemed to stay clear of it for some reason.

‘That kinda looks like an arena now that I look at it?’ Gary discerned.

Just then, the two students they had seen from before had entered the centre ring.

“I challenge you to a fight!” The lower rank student stated, while the other one just nodded. Once accepted, both of their badges lit up, and immediately the lower-ranked student’s arm transformed into one made of rock.

He leapt up, and swung his fist right towards the other’s face. His opponent lifted his hands to block, and was hit with a heavy blow. For some reason, he had not transformed, and now he was lying on the ground. He remained there, and ten seconds later the number on their badges changed.

The next moment, the student who had been ranked 47 before brushed himself off and walked away.

“I'm a bit confused as to what just happened?” Ian confessed.

Something strange was certainly going on in this facility, and it wasn't as straightforward as the others imagined.