

## Werewolf 651

### Chapter 651 Edvard's Power

The Altered Hunters were fully engaged, their attention fixed on Edvard as he spoke. The abnormality of the situation was apparent, prompting them to hang on his every word.

"The number of Altered in our world is increasing by the day!" exclaimed Edvard. "Scientists and researchers are discovering new methods to create even more Altered individuals. It's a trend that shows no sign of slowing down."

"By now, I'm certain that you're all aware of the black liquid that's spreading throughout the lower-tier cities. Some of you may have even had the unfortunate experience of encountering this new breed of Crazy Altered that has emerged as a result.

"Given the urgency of the situation, we have determined that the Altered Hunters must be put on a fast track to accelerate your progress," Edvard announced. The Hunters exchanged anxious glances, eager to hear what he had in mind.

"We will be seeking out the most exceptional among you, those with natural talents and abilities that set them apart. We will closely monitor your progress, with the aim of helping you become pillars that support the Altered Hunters of tomorrow," Edvard explained.

"Today, I've called you all to undergo a series of tests and assessments. Regardless of your current status, whether you have no stars or three stars, you will all be treated as equals. We will evaluate each of you based on your potential to excel as an Altered Hunter."

Murmurs and whispers rippled through the group. The stars were everything to an Altered Hunter. They represented their hard work and dedication to the cause, so how could their leader dismiss them so easily with his words?

"Now, now, I understand that all of you take pride in the stars you have earned up until now, and I'm not saying that we're abandoning the system completely. In fact, at the end of the tests, we will give you your new evaluation." Edvard explained. "With enough dedication and hard work, it's fully possible that any apprentice might make it as a three-star Hunter."

"However, if you fall behind your peers or show that you aren't deserving of your star rank, you'll only have yourself to blame. I assure you that this is all in the the best interest of the Hunters. It's an essential step to prepare for the looming war," he continued.

"In the upcoming conflict, we need to ensure that the best among us receive the support they need to succeed. Those who are close to becoming four-star Hunters will take an operative assessment with the four-star Hunters, with the potential to advance to five stars."

"After the assessments, you will be allowed to select weapons and armour from the Armory, equivalent to your new star grade. In the case your star rank has worsened, nobody is going to take back your current equipment. The shame in knowing that you aren't deemed worthy of it will hopefully serve as enough motivation to do better in the future," Edvard concluded.

Innu scanned the room, taking note of the other hunters' reactions to the news. As a newcomer with no stars, he had little to lose in this assessment, which allowed him to approach it with a sense of ease.

Many of the hunters with lower star ratings seemed highly motivated to prove themselves. Blake, in particular, had a glint of determination in his eyes, eager to demonstrate his worth.

Meanwhile, the more experienced hunters with three stars or more looked more uneasy than Innu had expected, likely feeling the pressure to maintain their status.

"This is my chance...my chance to stand by my father's side," Blake thought to himself, feeling a sense of determination wash over him.

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The assembled Altered Hunters trailed behind their leader and the five-star Hunters until they were eventually divided into two groups. The larger of the two groups comprised hunters with two stars or less, including Innu and Blake, and numbered in the thousands. They followed their leaders into a massive building that seemed to be carved into the mountain.

The ceiling was shrouded in darkness, providing no source of light to gauge the size of the room, but the dampness in the air hinted at its enormity. Innu followed the others, his hand brushing against the rocky wall, feeling the sharp edges and the moistness that clung to them.

Finally, they entered another large hall and were told to spread out. A few small light sources were attached to the wall, so they at least knew where the edge was, but even the Hunters kept bumping into each other.

Three five-star Hunters had entered the room with them: Fang, the ninja-like Hunter that Innu had talked with, Edvard the head, as well as a large man with a huge back who looked like a giant standing next to the other two.

"Everyone, throw your personal belongings on the floor in front of you, including any armour or hunter gear you have on your body," Edvard shouted.

Everyone did as they were told, and Innu even put his axes on the floor. Based on what he had learned about Anti-Altered equipment, he imagined this was a precaution to stop them from drawing the powers from their weapons.

"Alright, for the first test, I want everyone to get into this position," Edvard announced, gesturing to Fang who then demonstrated the proper form. The position was relatively straightforward: a squat with legs shoulder-width apart, knees bent, and buttocks hovering as if sitting on an invisible chair.

"Everyone hold your position! Remember, this is a competition, so don't give up easily," Edvard reminded them. With that, he signalled for the test to begin.

Without hesitation, the Hunters got into position, legs shoulder-width apart, and began to squat. Many of them had trained their bodies extensively and found the exercise relatively easy. However, Innu, a master at using his legs and training his leg muscles, found it particularly effortless and was sure that he could hold the position for an incredibly long time.

Ten minutes passed until the first started to drop out, though many of those who remained were sweating from the exercise.

Hugo, the towering five-star hunter, commented on their performance, "They're holding up pretty well."

Fang, who had previously demonstrated the position, looked towards Innu as he spoke, "We're not here to look for 'pretty well'. This is merely the first assessment, and we're searching for the truly talented among them."

"I see someone has caught your eye, Fang. There are a few in this group that have caught mine as well," Edvard stated. "We don't need this to take all day, so why don't we speed this up a bit?"

Edvard walked over to one of the Hunters who were sweating, focusing, trying to ignore the pain. Edvard stood right in front of him and then tilted his glasses down, revealing a pair of red glowing eyes. They twinkled slightly in the dark.

"Sit down," Edvard ordered the name.

As soon as the Hunter heard those words, it was almost as if he was possessed. He could feel something take over his body, and immediately he sat down on the floor and was out of the assessment.

"Let's keep this going," Edvard smiled, placing his sunglasses back on and walking to the next student.

Chapter 652 A power over the mind

Edvard went from one Hunter to another, executing the same mysterious move. From their perspective, all they could see was the leader of their country's Altered Hunter Association stand in front of their peers for one second, before they would collapse to their knees, powerless to resist.

Before, all the Hunters had to do was to endure the slowly increasing pain in their muscles, holding on until this part of the assessment was over. Now, they felt the pressure of knowing that their leader would eventually come over to them, testing them in his strange way.

The visible failure of others right in front of them was taking a toll on the Hunters' focus and concentration. They found themselves lost in their thoughts, unable to shake off the distracting mental images of their fellow participants collapsing before them. The impact was so significant that some participants failed before Edvard had a chance to get to them, their concentration broken beyond repair.

'Just what is going on? He isn't touching any of them, so why are they falling like dominos?' Innu racked his brain to make sense of the scene before him. 'Is this some sort of superpower like Ashen had, or could it be that Qi thing that he talked about.'

'I practised a bit of that energy, but it was mainly when using my weapons and not just through my body and on its own. Should I practise a bit now before he reaches me? Maybe it's better to just focus until it's my turn?'

The physical aspect of the assessment was a breeze for Innu, and he didn't need to put much mental effort into it. However, the presence of Edvard was causing him immense pressure. Innu was a doer, not a thinker, and he worried that there might be a hidden trick that he was supposed to uncover. If that were the case, he feared that he might fail at the very first hurdle.

For Blake he was trying to assess the situation more calmly.

'So far about 1 in every ten that Edvard approaches doesn't fall. There has to be a reason for that. Is it their ranking? The ones that passed are mostly three star hunters, but there are one star hunters that have passed while some two star hunters have fallen as well.'

Blake tried to remain calm as he assessed the situation. 'It seems like only one in ten participants manage to resist Edvard's move,' he observed. 'There has to be a reason for that. Most of the Hunters who pass are three-star, but there are also one-star Hunters who made it through, while some two-star Hunters failed.' Blake was trying to analyze the pattern and find a logical explanation for why some succeeded while others failed.

'If the ranking isn't the determining factor, then it must be something that the higher-star Hunters have likely experienced before.' As he pondered over the possibilities, it was finally his turn, and Edvard walked over towards him. Blake tried to remain composed as their eyes met, and Edvard gave him a reassuring smile. The smile momentarily eased Blake's nerves, and he took a deep breath, ready to face whatever lay ahead.

The two had met before, even talked for a short while, and although Edvard knew he wasn't supposed to show any favouritism, he was hoping that Blake wouldn't disappoint him.

"Try your best." Edvard whispered to the point that only the teenager before him could hear him as he pulled his glasses down.

Blake's gaze was immediately fixated on Edvard's piercing, red eyes, unable to look away. The darkness of the room only intensified their glow, making it seem as though he was being drawn into a vortex. However, he felt no other sensations until Edvard uttered a few specific words, which caused a sudden jolt of recognition to surge through him.

"Sit."

As soon as he heard the command, Blake felt a strange sensation in his legs. They were moving without his accord.

'What is happening to me? Is this some type of mind control?!!!' Blake was slightly panicking as he felt his legs start to move on their own. His brain was telling his legs to stop what they were doing, but they showed no signs of listening to him. He understood that he was about to join all the others who were sitting on the floor.

'I can't fail here!'

Drawing on the internal energy he had discovered during his training sessions, Blake felt a warmth emanating from his belly, which he channelled down to his legs. Since his conscious mind seemed to have lost control of his body, he focused all his attention on forcefully directing the energy into his legs, determined to remain standing.

His feet dug into the ground a little and his position stayed strong.

"I had faith in your abilities, you can take a breather now," Edvard whispered with a knowing tone.

The next moment he put his glasses back on, Blake did as he said, and stopped using the internal energy. He had yet to really master it, and it was draining his stamina far more so than the exercise. Nevertheless, he had done it, he had successfully passed.

After passing Edvard's assessment, Fang met with each successful student to inform them that they were through to the next round. However, they were still required to wait in the room until all the other students completed their assessments.

'Innu, I know you are strong and skilled... but I'm afraid to pass his test you need more than physical strength.' Blake worried about Innu's chances.

Innu, however, felt more determined than ever after seeing Blake pass.

'If he can do it, so can I. I won't fall behind,' he thought to himself. Still, that confidence started to waver with the increasing number of participants failing afterward.

Just before it was his turn, Edvard stood before a particularly large man. It was obvious that he was having no trouble with the exercise on its own, and his bulging muscles made even the likes of Austin look normal in comparison.

Alas, as soon as Edvard looked the man in the eyes, he sat down on the floor before Innu even had the chance to blink. Unlike those before him, there was no resistance at all this time.

'For weak-minded three-star Hunter like him, it's best if they fail here. They are not ready to make the jump. Giving them a position higher than they deserve will only serve as a quick way to send them to their death.' Edvard thought to himself, as he went over to the next person.

He paused for a slight moment as he looked at Innu. 'This was the one that Fang took an interest in. Let's see if his interest in this newbie is warranted.'

"Sit."

Hearing the command, Innu felt the same sensation as Blake. He imagined he had the axe in his hands... but for some reason he was unable to draw out the power of the Qi. It just wasn't working, and his right knee was getting ever closer to the floor.

Chapter 653 Willpower

Right now, Innu was experiencing a sensation he had never felt before. His legs weren't listening to him. They were moving on their own, and no matter how much his brain commanded them to stop what they were doing, they weren't listening.

'What the crap is this?!' Innu screamed internally. 'No, I have to keep calm, there has to be a way out of this. After all, Blake managed to pass, and so did a bunch of others. If I fail at the first test, doesn't that mean everything I went through, everything that I learned... all the pain, all the training, and suffering was for nothing?'

Edvard could see it Innu's bottom was heading downward, and there was almost no sign of resistance at all. In this case, it meant that the student would fail.

'I won't be beaten by this!' Innu refused to give up. All the pressure in his body felt like it was rising to the top of his head. The veins on his neck were showing as he tensed up, and he wasn't even taking in a breath of air.

Forcing his body, he bit down on the bottom of his lip until blood started to flow. At the same time, Innu clenched his hands so hard that his fingernails dug into the palm of his hand.

"I'm sorry, but I'm not following your order... sir!" Innu shouted out. His legs spread out in a sumo stance. It looked comical, yet it was enough to prevent his bottom from touching the floor.

Everyone heard his angry shout, and as they saw the teenager still standing, a smile spread across their faces. Despite the grunts and struggles of pain that he endured, Innu had managed to pass the challenge in a way that none of the others had been able to.

So far, it seemed to vary in terms of struggling - either they would get through it with ease, with a little bit of struggling like Blake, or there would be no resistance at all. Seeing someone like Innu pass in this unusual way filled them with hope for their own challenge.

Edvard placed his glasses back on and looked at Innu in front of him. He could see the blood drip from his hands onto the ground and down from his lip. He hadn't even wiped it away.



'Did he just overcome the influence power with sheer will?' Edvard thought. 'I'm certain that adjusted the level of Influence to match those in the room, so I guess it would be possible, but to have such strength, he is a special one.'

Edvard then went close to Innu and placed his hand on his shoulder. He was the first Hunter he had done this to.

"Congratulations, you pass," Edvard said, placing his hand on the teenager's shoulder. Innu felt a rush of elation, particularly since he was the only one to receive such open praise from their leader. Lost in his joy, he didn't even notice the other giving him a quick sniff before pulling away. "You should "That was the strangest test I've ever experienced," Innu noted, as he sat down next to Blake. "Is that something that all the five-star Hunters learn or something?"

clean yourself up," Edvard continued, "Follow Fang and he'll get you patched up. Blood is not a pretty sight."

With Innu passing, he and Blake gave each other a thumbs up, and all those who passed were following Fang into another area. In that area, they noticed several people who didn't look like Hunters. They were wearing peculiar nurse outfits with white masks covering their faces.

The two weren't sure if it was a coincidence, but all of them were women. Without asking any questions, one of them went towards Innu and started patching him up.

The room was somewhat like a locker room at a gym, with several benches for people to sit on, and they waited and waited for others to join them.

"That was the strangest test I've ever experienced," Innu noted, as he sat down next to Blake. "Is that something that all the five-star Hunters learn or something?"

Blake shrugged his shoulders. "That was the first time I experienced that myself. It was like I lost control of my whole body."

Innu was happy to hear that Blake had a similar experience to his. He would have been disheartened if he hadn't, but it was still clear that Blake had gotten through it easier than him. Just as he opened his mouth to ask more question, another Hunter walked past.

"Oh, hey, you're that guy that screamed at the top of his lungs, right?" The Hunter looked to be in his twenties. He had a clean face free of scars or marks, and his hair was swept back and brown. With such a clean face, Innu was actually reminded of Kai a bit, which immediately gave him a knee-jerk reaction not to trust this guy too much.

"Ah, yeah, that was me. The assessment was a bit harder than what I thought," Innu nervously laughed.

"Hard?" The man replied. "Well, I was here to check out the competition, but if you thought that was hard, then I guess there's no hope for you. Blake, I look forward to seeing who is the better of us two."

With just those words, the young man walked off and carried on, annoying a few other people as well.

"Who was that jerk?" Innu asked.

"He's called Rad. He's a two-star Hunter. I don't know why, but it seems like he has always been trying to compete with me," Blake answered.

"Probably because he's scared of you. I mean, you are pretty skillful," Innu stated.

"So are you, Innu. Unlike me, you haven't been trained to be an Altered Hunter from a young age, and yet you have won the acknowledgement of Ashen," Blake encouraged him.

For some reason, after the last assessment, he felt a bit disheartened and didn't believe that fully, but there was his trump card, the skill he had learned from Ashen that he wasn't allowed to show anyone.

"Anyway, I wonder what the next assessment will be?"

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Edvard was talking to a few of the four-star Hunters. Their assessment would happen another time, so for today, he had asked them to help him set up the next stage for Blake, Innu and the others. After explaining everything, Edvard called out one of the four-star hunters to talk to them in private.

"I want you to do me a favour," Edvard whispered. "Keep an eye on the black-skinned boy with blonde hair. He has the smell of a mutt on him."

#### Chapter 654 The second Assessment

At the beginning of the assessment, the room was packed with thousands of Altered Hunters. However, after the first test, the number of remaining participants dwindled down to only a few hundred. The once-crowded room now appeared nearly empty, with barely a hundred people left to continue the evaluation.

After getting a few refreshments and touch-ups, the group was asked to follow Edvard, the other two five-star Hunters, as well as the ten four-star Hunters who were helping out. They all continued through the strange, cave-like place until eventually, they had reached a large hole. The exit of the car shone a bright light on them all.

It strained the eyes of a few contestants as it was a great contrast to what they had been in so far, but when their eyes adjusted, the sight in front of them looked beautiful.

"This was on the other side of the mountain!" one of the Hunters exclaimed in amazement.

"It's a place that is only known to a few," Edvard explained. "But believe me when I say this, not everything is as it seems."

Everyone couldn't help but stare out. It was a beautiful sight, giving off the feeling of a forgotten piece of land that was covered by other mountains. A large mass of land with giant green trees, running waterfalls, large lakes, and more. It was as if they were in a completely different world.

At the same time, it looked like the only way to get to such a place was either by climbing one of the large mountains or coming through the mountain like they had done.

What was surprising to Innu, though, was the reaction of the other Hunters. It was understandable for him and Blake to not know anything about this, but some of the Hunters next to them already had three stars, especially the older looking ones should have known about this place...

If not, then what was the reason for the leader and the other higher-ups to keep it a secret?

"You have all done well to pass the first assessment," Edvard began. "Those that have failed will be taking additional tests to further evaluate their position, but for all of you, you have been deemed as having the talent we are looking for."

The Hunters looked at each other with smiles on their faces. Some of them enjoyed the praise more so than others.

"However, as you should know, just because a person has talent doesn't mean they will grow into someone great," Edvard continued. "They may get lazy, too big-headed, or overconfident. Usually, one might get humbled by others like them out there. Alas, in our line of duty getting humbled is often accompanied by death."

Those who were smiling just moments ago quickly straightened up their act, knowing full well that the head of the Hunters was talking about them.

"Down below, there are things that you would never have even imagined," Edvard revealed. "Down there, you will find out the reason why we Altered Hunters exist. You all know that Altered come from the ancient beasts of the past, and in this task, it will be your job to face them."

Everyone started to look at each other, wondering what the head was talking about. Were there perhaps Altered that had been captured and locked away down there? If that was the case, it certainly sounded cruel. Hearing this, a certain diary came to Blake's mind. A diary of the origins of the Altered and how they used to face the deadly beasts.

Edvard clicked his fingers, and in a tight steel cage, four Altered Hunters were seen carrying something out. Several loud growls could be heard; they were violent and constantly whatever was inside was crashing against the cage.

Placing it on the ground, now all of them could see clearly what was in front of them.

"What we have here are known as beasts. This is what some of your weapons are made out of; this is what Altered are made out of as well. As you can see, they are vicious things that kill humans on sight."

The beast was black-skinned in colour, muscular in size on all fours. It had razor-sharp teeth and narrow eyes. Constantly, it was bearing its teeth at the Hunters, banging against the cage, and there was something about it that activated an instinct in every human who laid eyes on it. It was kill or be killed.

"Are they saying that in that place, there are more of those... things?" one of the Hunters couldn't believe it.

"Correct," Edvard answered. "The Altered Hunters have created several breeding grounds, and down below is one of them. Many of you should be aware of this fact, and some lucky ones may have even experienced it, while Anti-Altered weapons help us deal with Altered, they don't hold a candle compared to beast weapons.

"To create those, we need the crystals that grow inside those beasts. This is why we keep them contained in a certain area, and why they are still alive. It's ironic that we must use them to get rid of them, but it is a fact that we must accept.

"For all of you, though, the next stage of the ascent will begin below. The beasts are not of high level; you are to kill five of them and bring back five crystals that reside in them.

"If you are successful, you will pass this stage and move onto the final stage. The four-star Altered Hunters will be out there observing you in case you end up overestimating your abilities.

"But remember, there are only a thirteen of us, while there are over a hundred of you. Although we are skillful, and will do our best to keep you alive, it is impossible for us to keep an eye on all of you, so make you do not meet your end here.

"In the end, you are the one in charge of your own life. You have five minutes to prepare. Grab your equipment, use what you can, and we will head down below."

Innu was starting to wonder just what type of world he had gotten himself into.

#### Chapter 655 The first beast

With focused determination, they readied themselves by donning the necessary equipment. Simultaneously, their eyes remained fixed on the captive beast, scouring for any subtle indications of potential weak points. While many among them had confronted Altered in the past, there was an undeniable disparity when it came to facing this new type of creature that had been presumed extinct mere minutes earlier. A distinct air of uncertainty hung in the atmosphere, underscoring the gravity of the situation and reflecting in their collective gaze.

For those that lacked decent equipment, they were handed out basic Anti-Altered equipment of their choosing. One of the four-star hunters approached Innu, who had refused since he had his pair of red axes. The moment he took them out of the bag, they caught the attention of many Hunters, even those around Edvard.

The weapons stood out conspicuously, defying the notion of being basic in any way, leaving everyone pondering the significant cost one would incur to possess such extraordinary armaments. Even more astonishing was the realization that these formidable weapons were in the possession of a no-star Hunter, shattering any preconceived notions of the correlation between rank and equipment prowess.

‘Alright, I feel a lot more comfortable now that I’m holding these two.’ Innu smiled, which was something he thought he would have never said. In the past, he had relied on nothing but his own body, but the ability to draw out energy from his axes was something he didn’t want to miss during this assessment. As he observed his surroundings, Innu tuned in to the conversations of his fellow Hunters. There was still some time left before they were required to descend, allowing for further discussion and preparation.

“So, what do you think the best way to handle this is?” one of the Hunters asked his peer.

deserved to be here.

“None of us have any idea how to deal with them, so I suggest we treat this as if we were hunting Altered and group up. There is nothing in the rules that prevents us from doing so, and it should make it safer for all of us.”

Most of the Hunters seemed to agree with this approach and in a matter of seconds small groups started to band together, the strong three-star Hunters grouped up in pairs of two or three, whereas the weaker Hunters created groups of five and more.

Unsurprisingly, there were also some that decided to stay on their own. Among them was Rad, the student who once again gave Innu a conceited look when he noticed the teenager looking at him.

'I bet you're just on your own because nobody wants to work with a stuck up guy like you,' Innu thought to himself.

Innu's gaze shifted towards Blake, considering the possibility of collaborating with him, but it quickly became apparent that the young Altered Hunter was immersed in his own preparations. It dawned on Innu that Blake was determined to seize this moment and shine independently, not desiring to share the spotlight with anyone else, and he respected that about him.

Without exchanging words, they silently conveyed their well-wishes, acknowledging each other's presence but understanding that they would not be joining forces. Each intended to face the challenges ahead on their own terms, driven by a desire to prove their mettle and show off that they deserved to be here.

"There is one problem," one of the Hunters suddenly realised. "They said as soon as someone takes out five beasts, that they are to head back immediately without helping anyone else. So if we're in a large group, no matter what, we'll eventually have to take out of one of them by ourselves."

"Alright," Edvard clapped his hands to signal that time was up. "The assessment will now begin."

Lifting the top of the cage, the fierce beast rushed out toward them all. It was an unexpected act, and they had never dealt with something so aggressive before. The beast immediately jumped up and landed on one of the Hunters. Its heavy weight and strength pushed down its target and it used its sharp teeth to bite into the poor man's forearm, making him drop his weapon.

"Help, someone, help me!" the Hunter cried for help.

One of his teammates charged in, but with a swing of the beast's claw, the charging Hunter was hit in the stomach and went flying away. Seeing this made the others Hunters realise that the beast was stronger than they had anticipated.

In the first place, most of the time when the Hunters fought against Altered, it was through surprise attacks and in groups. This was different from the way they were used to fighting. At the moment, no one wanted to approach the beast, and it looked like one of the four-star Hunters would have to step in.

"Ahhh, help!" the trapped Hunter screamed as the beast's teeth went through the armour and hit flesh. The struggling then stopped, blood covering the student's face, and looking at the beast, it was still as if a sharp sword had been lodged right through its neck. Pulling the sword out, then kicking the beast away, the body lay on the side, revealing Blake stood there with a bloody black sword.

'He managed to cut through the beast's hide relatively easily. I don't think it was the weapon. As I expected, he has full control over his strength. I knew he was special,' Edvard inwardly smiled.

When all the other Hunters were frozen in fear, only one of them acted when it really mattered, and that was Blake. Some, seeing this, were jealous. After seeing how easily the beast was defeated, they thought they could have come in and done the same thing.

Looking at the beast, though, Blake soon noticed something, and another person was walking toward it.

'What is that doing there?' Blake wondered.

The student came over and pulled out the red axe from the side of the head, and smiled while an announcement was made.

"The first point for this assessment goes towards our Apprentice Hunter," Fang announced, pointing at Innu.

Chapter 656 Beasts' Jungle

When Blake caught sight of the red axe, he was certain it belonged to Innu. Its familiarity was too uncanny to belong to anyone else. But the question that lingered in his mind was when exactly Innu had



thrown it. Unbeknownst to him, there was actually yet another individual who had taken action simultaneously.

With a firm grip on the axe, Innu tapped into its inherent energy, allowing it to surge through him. This time, however, he went a step further, infusing his own energy into the weapon. It mirrored the technique he had been diligently practising, the very same method that had allowed him to throw the axe and strike Midwak with precision.

Innu took advantage of the fact that the beast was consumed by its bloodlust, fixated on the single unfortunate Hunter it was trying to devour. Its immobility only bolstered his confidence, as he became increasingly certain that he could seize this opportunity to strike it down. With his axe charged and brimming with energy, he hurled it forward.

The weapon had sailed through the air, bypassing the motionless Hunters who remained frozen in awe, their senses temporarily paralysed by the sheer ferocity of the beast. The only one who had noticed this was Fang that, and that was solely due to him paying extra close attention to Innu after finding out that Ashen had taken him as his student.

Around the same time, Blake had moved and lifted his sword to thrust it through the back of the beast's neck, but the axe had already hit the beast's side of the head, digging in deep enough to reach the brain. Out of the two of them, Innu's attack was faster, leading Fang to announce the kill as his achievement.

"That makes no sense," Rad commented, holding a spear in his hand. "He struggled so much in the last assessment, but he can do something like that. Maybe he just swung his axe and prayed. I guess that's the real part of this test, if you have the guts to fight."

"We're surrounded, there are like six of them here!"

"It looks like they can smell us... we're not the ones hunting them, they're the ones hunting us!"

"What are you all standing around for?" Edvard shouted, waking the other Hunters from their stupor. "The first Hunter has managed to get a point. If you want to pass this assessment, you better get down there and do the same."

The Hunters were still nervous. If anything, they were even more nervous after seeing the viciousness of just a single beast. They had confidence having fought Altered, but all of that was thrown out of the window.

There was a winding pathway that went down the mountain to the special place below. At a fast walking pace, it would take around thirty minutes to get from where they were to the bottom.

Most went off in groups into the jungle, while the four-star Hunters had split up, following them at a distance behind to help minimise the risk of casualties. It didn't take long for the groups to encounter their first beasts in the large jungle-like space. Alas, despite grouping up their courage seemed to have disappeared after the earlier show.

'Why is my body shaking so much? I've taken out a few Altered before, so this should be no problem!' One of them asked herself while trying to stop from shaking. Her group could still be considered to be lucky, as other groups were encountering groups of beasts, and not all of them were the same as the one that had been in the cage.

"We're surrounded, there are like six of them here!"

"It looks like they can smell us... we're not the ones hunting them, they're the ones hunting us!"

A group of five Altered Hunters were surrounded by a mixture of monkey and wolf-like beasts. The beasts went in at the same time, and the Hunters fought back, but they were unable to fight the way they usually would. Their movements proved sluggish, and their minds were hesitant about the right moves.

In the end, the beasts were winning out. Most of the Hunters got injured during the first clash, with parts of their armour cut up and ripped, and they could barely stand. The wolf-like beast charged in once again until a Hunter wearing a mask came out and, with a swing of his sword, sliced the neck of the beast, killing it in one go.

"Now that I have gotten involved, you should know that you have all failed," the Hunter pointed out the obvious. He continued to take out the beasts one after the other, and the others watched in awe. Putting his sword away, he walked up to them.

“All of you have fought Altered, so it should have posed little problem for you to take down those beasts who are physically weaker. You could have easily used your group’s strength to win.”

“What? That can’t be true,” one of the Hunters cried out in disbelief.

“Why should I lie to you at this point? You see, the real test of this assessment isn’t whether or not you can defeat five beasts. It’s if you can overcome the feeling these beasts produce, bloodlust. There are Altered out there that can emit the same amount of bloodlust as these beasts, so it’s an important step for you to improve.”

The Hunters’ task was to overcome the overwhelming feeling of bloodlust, but there were those in this assessment who had already overcome a larger amount of bloodlust, so for them, it was a walk in the park.

‘Two more, and I’m done,’ Blake thought. ‘I wonder if I’m faster than Innu.’

Innu had just finished killing his second beast, giving him a total of two points. He was by a river with a large bed of rocks to its side. The beast lay bloody on the ground, along with his axe.

In the jungle, up on one of the trees, a distance away, one of the Hunters had carefully been watching him.

‘I guess it would make sense. If he has been around a Werewolf or seen a Werewolf before, then these beasts will mean nothing to him. I wonder what his connection is,’ the Hunter thought.

Turning his head, Innu heard rustling from the trees and lifted his two axes in a defensive stance.

“Look who I managed to run into,” Rad greeted him with a huge smile on his face. “I was really looking for your friend, but I guess you will have to do. I can’t wait to see his face when he finds out his friend failed the task.”

'All I wanted to do was join the Hunters... amidst fighting living beasts why do I now have to deal with this psycho,' Innu inwardly sighed as he understood that it would be impossible to leave without fighting Rad.

Chapter 657 Finishing The Job

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Innu asked, holding both axes in his hands and getting into a fighting stance. "Don't you think it's better if you just focus on getting the crystals like the original task was?"

Rad chuckled, holding the spear in his hand. It wasn't the basic Anti-Altered equipment, where the spear would light up with a bit of electricity. This one, just like Innu's axes, looked like it was made from beasts.

The spear itself was a faded white, almost like a bone colour, while having several parts that were wrapped in a brown, woolly-type material. The sharp end even looked more like a tooth, as the spear curled slightly.

"There's no time limit for this assessment," Rad answered. "As long as I'm still able to fight, it will be okay, and there's nothing against the rules of fighting against each other."

Finishing his sentence, Rad placed the spear under his arm and pointed it forward. He then shifted his position forward. The spear cut the air, and Rad was able to dash the large distance of ten metres in one leap towards him.

Yet Innu was still ready. As he poured energy into the axe, he moved to the side, avoiding it, and swung, hitting the side. The blow was a heavy one, far heavier than Rad expected. His whole body was moved to the side along with the spear.

Trying to recover, Rad swung the spear in a sweeping motion, and Innu had jumped over the entire spear. The second his feet landed back on the ground, it was Innu's turn to dash forward, and their two faces were right next to each other.

"If he hits me with that axe, I'm done for!" Rad thought, his eyes glued to the sharp edge.

The axe never came down, though, and instead, Innu swiped his sharp elbow to the side, flicking it and hitting the right side of Rad's face. His head had been hit, and his vision was a little blurry.

When he could finally see again, Rad could see a foot right in front of his face. It smashed into his nose, and his whole body hit back as he landed on the floor.

"All these hits, they really hurt!" Rad thought. "But I've been hit and hurt badly before. I just need to fight through it and get through this. This person, who has no stars, they can't be stronger than an Altered. That's impossible."

Pushing off the ground with one foot, Rad slid across the floor, and then using his own spear, he pushed it into the ground to help him get up. He wiped the blood from his nose with the sleeve of his hand while taking a second look at Innu.

"You're a bit more resilient than I thought you would be. I'll give you that," Innu said. "But you're not as good as I thought you would be either."

With both of the red axes, Innu threw them into the ground. They were stuck upright with the sharp edge inside.

"I can just use my body to beat you," Innu said.

This clearly angered Rad as he scrunched up his face and charged in once again with his spear.

"If you think you can make a fool of me like this, then you will pay with your life!"

When Rad got close, the stabbing motion became a sweeping motion, and the spear went right toward the side of Innu. A loud snapping noise was made as the spear hadn't hit the rib but instead hit the leg of Innu.

In a defensive motion, Innu had lifted up his leg, so the spear hit the shin instead.

"How can you even take a hit like that? Is your leg made out of iron or something?" Rad shouted.

Innu started to fight in again, the spear coming towards him, and each time he would avoid it. If it was going to hit his body, he would block with his forearms or his legs and continue forward.

"You have no idea... you have no idea how much I trained to make my body as hard as it could be. For you, getting stronger might have been for fun, but for me, it was the way of putting food on the table, and not just for me, but for all of those in my family and in the orphanage as well!"

Getting close to Rad, Innu went for a punch and hit him straight in the stomach. Rad was still holding onto his weapon for dear life and had no way to block the attack. Moreover, he couldn't; he had always used his spear to fight.

His body bent forward from the hit, and as his head went down with his chin wide open, Innu went to knee him. It hit perfectly, sending his whole body in the air once more, and for Rad to land right on his back.

"I've experienced quite a lot recently in a short amount of time," Innu said, looking at Rad, who still had his eyes open, staring straight at Innu.

"I know that look in your eyes. Right now, if I don't do anything about you, you will just come back for me again, and will be an even bigger problem. I have to get rid of you now."

Innu lifted his leg up high, up to almost his head, and with the heel of his foot, he swung down with all of his weight heading right for Rad's head. Moments before it reached it though, a hand grabbed onto Innu's foot.

It was stopped dead, with almost no resistance at all. Looking at who had stopped it, it was none other than one of the four-star hunter helpers.

"I'm afraid I can't let you do that." The man was wearing a black mask, but for a second, Innu wasn't too sure, but he thought he could see a slight glow in their eyes.

Chapter 658 The Last Assessment

Innu lifted his leg away from the examiner. He had somewhat expected that this might be the result. Although in a place like this, there seemed to be a plentiful number of Altered hunters, in truth, there weren't many that would be willing to take up the role, and losses in their members were a big hit to them.

Innu could only hope that the fact he would follow through with this, that Rad would back off because if this were to happen again, and outside the Altered Hunters' protection, then the ending might have been a different story.

"These four-star Altered hunters are no joke," Innu thought. "He stopped my kick, and there was almost no give at all. I guess it's to be expected these guys are only a step down from Ashen, and I think he would have been able to do the same.

"I wonder if I stay in the Altered hunter group like this, would my strength be able to grow to the same level as theirs?"

The hunter started to look after Rad, and after a few moments, he was back on his feet again. The injuries that had been received on his body didn't seem to be too bad.

"I will leave it up to you; it's your decision to make. You can either drop out of the assessment or continue in the current condition you're in," the four-star hunter explained. "But if your injuries cause you major trouble until the point you are in a dangerous situation, I will have to take you out of the assessment.

"You have to remember, this was your decision to start this fight, and you now have to go through with that."

The decision seemed quite fair, and while the instructor was busy giving Rad some type of lecture, Innu decided to go off in search of beasts again.

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The rest of the assessment went on, with some hunters finding it hard, some finding it easy, and others managing to overcome the task and grow as intended during the assessment. Blake was the first person who had managed to pass the test.

He had climbed back up the mountain, where the opening was seen and where Edvard was waiting. All one had to do was then show the crystals, and they would have been considered to have passed.

As for the students that failed, they were taken further and back to the rest of the Altered hunters.

"You did well, I'm sure your father will be proud of you," Edvard stated.

Time continued to pass, and students were seen climbing the tower area bit by bit. What had surprised Blake was the fact that so far, a few had arrived but not one of them was Innu.

"Did something happen to him during the assessment? No, that can't be possible," Blake thought. "I know his skill level. He should have no problem taking out beasts with his skill."

He waited and waited, and after five other students came up, the man with the bright red axes on his back could be seen.

"What's that look on your face for, did you really think that your apprentice would fail?" Innu said, handing over the crystals to Edvard.

Edvard had also expected this result, after catching a particular smell on him, and he couldn't wait to hear what the report had to say.

Standing next to Blake, they now all needed to wait for the others to either finish the task and pass or fail. Surprisingly or unsurprisingly, a whole day had passed. The group had been given food while some were still fighting.

They even managed to see hunters return with large injuries on them and be rushed straight off. Finally, there were 21 of them that had passed the test.



"Is this everyone?" One of the hunters asked.

"No, there was one more of you," Edvard answered.

This surprised the others because the hunters were quite a distance away from Edvard, and when asking the question, they were talking to their friends and had spoken in a relatively quiet voice, and yet somehow Edvard was able to hear them and answer them.

"Who could the last student be?"

Innu knew the answer to this because he had been keeping an eye on all of those that went in and out. Finally, the last student could be heard walking up the staircase. They needed to see if they had passed or not.

Coming up with ripped clothing, bloody hands, and using his spear to walk was none other than Rad.

"Here are the stupid rocks," Rad said, taking them from his waist bag and handing them over. Rad had passed, and with that, it meant there were a total of 22 students that would move on to the final assessment.

They had all been gathered with the sun shining behind them, and Edvard standing towards them with his back against the outside.

"All of you here have done well. You have shown the talent needed to progress, and for the Hunter's Association to put their time and resources into you," Edvard explained. "After passing this task, all of those that were non-stars, 1 star, or 2 stars, will now have three stars placed on their body."

The smiles on the faces of all of those around were huge, nearly from ear to ear. They had done it. There were those that were already three stars, so this news meant nothing to them, but they were still happy that they had proven they were better than the others and knew there was still one assessment to go.

"As a reward, all of you may access the hunters barracks and select whatever items you wish from it!" Edvard declared. "As for the final assessment, as I have said, you have proven yourself as the most talented hunters that we need to look after.

"Which is why we want to take you all directly under our wing and have you stay with the main group for an entire year."

Innu's heart thumped slightly because he wasn't sure he heard that right. By staying with the main group, did that mean away from the Howlers, from all of the others?

Chapter 659 The Final Assessment

The final part of the third assessment had been revealed to the 22 Hunters that were currently there, and it wasn't what any of them expected, especially not Innu. After hearing the news, he immediately raised his hand to ask a question.

"I'm sorry, but when you say 'work directly under the Altered Hunters', what do you exactly mean by that?" Innu asked.

Edvard responded, "It's precisely as it sounds. We have assessed that among all the new Hunters, you who have passed, possess the most remarkable talents to forge ahead. Once we're done polishing your skills, you will become significant pillars within the Altered Hunter Association."

"Considering the significance of this endeavour, it would be imprudent to allow you to roam freely without guidance. The optimal approach is for us to provide you with direct guidance, enabling you to reach the pinnacle of your potential," Edvard emphasized.

The others appeared content, considering it an honour to rise in the organisation, and most of them already had family ties to the Altered Hunter Association, so this type of arrangement would have little impact on their lives.

Unfortunately, Innu's situation was completely different from theirs "Does that mean you want us to remain in here for an entire year?"

Edvard chuckled reassuringly, dismissing the teenager's misconception. "You appear to have been a bit too engrossed in one of those cultivation stories. Progressing significantly won't happen by merely staying in a cave like this one. Each of you will be paired with a seasoned hunter."

He continued, "You'll embark on a journey across the country, moving from one base to another, actively participating in addressing the Altered situation. During your travels, your assigned mentors will provide guidance, training, and support to facilitate your growth."

Edvard further explained, "Although a year may appear lengthy to you young ones, I assure you it will pass by much faster than anticipated. By the end of this period, the Association will be in a favourable position to take action."

Innu's head was spinning a little, because his worst fear was coming true. He had never been interested in hunting down Altered, and his main reason for joining them was just to get stronger, not follow their ideologies. After all, his true loyalty was with the Howlers.

It was only because he had been surrounded with strong people, surrounded by Ashen that he thought he was in the right place to grow, and so far he felt like he was, but he was getting in a little too deep.

In a hushed tone, Blake leaned in closer to Innu, expressing his concern. "I'm sorry, Innu, but leaving at this point isn't an option. You possess crucial information about the base's location and you have seen the faces of many high-ranking Hunters. If you attempt to withdraw now, it could lead to significant trouble."

Blake could sense Innu's panic, and he understood that his reason for joining them today was different from theirs. He didn't want him to say anything wrong in that state and as his supposed mentor, he played the role of reassuring his former apprentice.

"Are we at least able to go home?" Innu eventually asked. His previous tone replaced by a different demeanour, seeking a favour from those around him. "I have people waiting for me who would be worried sick if I suddenly went missing."

Edvard didn't reply straight away, looking around to see if there was anyone else who had similar issues. He could see that a few of them were pondering about the same issue. After all, none of them had expected to become three-star Hunter this very day.

The leader finally responded with a soft tone. "We haven't yet provided any details about our plans for today, so it's understandable that some of you feel unprepared to leave everything behind. Everyone will have a few days to return and attend to their personal matters. Additionally, I recommend that you gather and bring any necessary belongings with you."

Innu's spirits lifted upon hearing the news. The final assessment had been temporarily halted, but before they departed, they all headed towards the barracks. Nobody wanted to miss out on the opportunity to select a weapon or armour of their choice. With the availability of three-star equipment, a multitude of upgrades awaited them.

Blake was there to guide Innu, and recommended various items he considered to be useful for the latter, including the general better armour and mask that the Hunters used.

Although the armour used by Hunters looked similar they were actually different with small details and materials used. Innu could tell upon touch that just like his axes they also had a power he could draw from them that improved his strength.

Blake selected another pair of swords, one black and the other purple in colour, he still kept his red blades as well that he had picked up last time. He would keep two down by his side and two on his back, just in case he ever needed a spare during a fight.

"I think your axes are better weapons than anything you can get in a three-star room." Blake commented. Innu examined the available weapons and found himself agreeing with that assessment. However, he also recognized that the three-star equipment came close in quality to his axes. He couldn't help but imagine the calibre of weaponry accessible to the four and five-star Hunters, which intrigued him.

After picking up everything they needed, the two of them left the barracks with a smile on their face, and started to head out of the large building to the original entrance they had come through.

"Wow, I still can't believe it. This feels surreal. Did we really fight beasts earlier?" Innu questioned it all. "I have no idea how I'm going to explain any of this to the guys."

"I'm sorry." Blake let out a sigh. "I really had no idea that this would happen. Such a reform has basically been unheard of in the history of the Hunters."

When the two of them finally left, they were about to head down the long trail to where their bike was parked, but a figure landed right in front of the two of them.

When turning around, they could see a man standing there with sunglasses on his head and wearing a shirt that was unbuttoned on the top.

"Edvard...Sir!" Blake immediately bowed down, and Innu followed.

"There's no need for that. Anyway, I've come to collect you so we can start our journey." Edvard explained.

Innu and Blake looked at each other with raised eyebrows.

"What do you mean, sir, didn't you say we could go home?" Blake asked.

"I did, but I just talked with your father who agreed to take care with any school matters that might trouble you." Edvard stated. "As I told you, each student will have to follow an experienced hunter, and in your case that experienced hunter is me.

"There still hasn't been one assigned to Innu yet, but since the two of you are both heading back to the same place, I shall accompany you. Feel free to deal with any matters that your father might be unable to."

None of them could refute the Altered Hunter leader, who had decided to accompany them back to Slough.

Chapter 660 The Search For One Man

In the small town of Slough, the Howlers gang was back to the constant developing they had been doing so far. They worked around the city, protected and helped the people, and improved their image with the locals.

It was a plan set up by Kai, and it was working well. In some ways, the local people who lived in Slough were seeing the business tycoon known as Gary Dem and the Howlers Corporation as the ones who ran the city.

The general standard of living had improved for all. Crime rates were down, and even employment as well as immigration from other towns were on the rise. These were all things that the Mayor had promised, but none of them were the result of the Mayor.

For the core members of the Howlers, though, the mood was a little somber. For the first time in a while, all the core members were at the Wolf's Pool Club. Well, not all, as Gary had already left, and for some reason, Innu hadn't arrived even though he had been invited.

"What has that guy been doing these days?" Austin asked. "I mean, heck, even Olivia is here. She's been coming here more often these days, and we've been seeing Innu less and less."

"Do you not like Olivia being here or something?" Kai smirked.

"Originally, no," Austin replied. "But after meeting Midwak, I have the feeling that she is the lesser of the two evils, and I guess the fact that she has gotten closer with Marie isn't so much of a bad thing."

It was due to Olivia being close with Marie that the two of them were appearing more often together and that Olivia was attending more of the events.

As for the reason for the get-together, everyone had felt a little strange after meeting Midwak. They had managed to solve one of the bigger problems they had, but the larger issues at hand were still there.

Because of this, all of them wanted Gary to stay for a bit. It was hard for them to explain, even though Gary didn't seem to do much and wasn't in charge of leader-like things. They were motivated by him just being around. Maybe it was because he was so motivated to keep moving forward and was the type to never rest.

Regardless, they thought that Gary would have stayed for a little longer, maybe at least until the next full moon, so they could be sure that the Vow had worked, but he had returned to the Altered Academy.

He had been away for a long time and needed to get back. Once he was done, he would return to the others anyway. They were just getting a little impatient.

"Have you been looking into that other request I asked?" Kai said.

Austin took a big gulp of his drink, finishing it on the spot before placing it back down on the table.

"We practically know everything there is about Slough. We have asked all the members to inquire about him. They've talked to local businesses, and we even looked through card transactions. There's no one that goes by that name. Heck, I even asked all of those at the schools if they had ever heard of this person.

"The whole thing is strange. If he used to live in this town, then someone should know about him, right? And that letter that Amy got, we found out it was hand-delivered, which means someone must have done it in person, maybe the one you're looking for."

The person they were talking about was Gary's father. Ideally, Kai would have liked to have gotten some information by the time Gary had returned, and he was finding it very hard to believe that they were unable to find one person.

"Usually, in a case like this, if it's so hard to find someone, it means that they don't want to be found, but I wonder why? Just who is Gary's father... to be on the run, and from whom and what."

"There is one person in Slough that we still haven't asked who might know something," Kai suggested.

Austin thought about it for a while, but a name didn't come to mind.

"He's useless in most situations, but I have a feeling that he might be handy."

Upon hearing this sentence and the word 'useless,' someone did come to mind.

"The Mayor?"

"Bingo!" Kai smiled, and the two of them laughed for a bit.

"I'll go pay a visit to the Mayor. I'm sure he'll be happy to see me."

Austin was confident he could deal with the Mayor on his own. What surprised him, as well as the others, was the fact that the Mayor had never retaliated since the last time. Was it because he realised the Howlers were doing a better job than him, or was he just biding his time? Either way, Kai didn't think he was a big enough problem to worry about, especially as they would enter the next phase of their plan.

What they did have to be careful of was making too many enemies. Right now, there were enemies working for them, such as Midwak and Ben Clove, but at any point in time, if they turned around while the enemy was attacking them as well, it could be disastrous for the Howlers.

"We need to find as many people who are loyal to the Howlers, and only to the Howlers. That is how we will be able to create a gang that rises to the top."

There were a few people that came to mind, people he would like to invite to live in Slough. Recent individuals that Gary had become quite close to.

In the middle of their conversation, Kai felt his phone vibrate. Pulling it out, he read the message and was surprised at who it was from.

"It looks like we might actually get to see Innu today. Maybe he will tell us what he's been doing this whole time," Kai stated.