

H. Academy 867

Chapter 867 - No title

The dull thud of my foot meeting stone echoed through the training hall as my kick shattered the golem's core, sending its massive frame crumbling into dust. Another enemy neutralized. But even as I moved on to the next, my mind wasn't fully present.

My body responded automatically, weaving through the battlefield with practiced precision, striking at the weak points of each construct with ruthless efficiency. But my thoughts... they were still caught in the aftermath of Eleanor's evaluation.

'You've developed habits.'

I side-stepped a golem's massive fist, feeling the air pressure shift an instant before the impact landed. My blade slashed upward, severing its arm before it could retract.

'You've trained yourself to react to superior forces—not by clashing with them, but by adapting before they even press down on you.'

It wasn't a lie. In fact, it was probably one of the most accurate assessments anyone had made about me.

I had been subjected to many strong pressures before. Reina's was suffocating, a crushing force that threatened to break bones just by existing near her. Dakota's was sharp, precise, a pressure that cut through every layer of defense like a blade slipping through silk. There had been others, too—monsters, humans, beings that exuded power so suffocating it forced me to find ways to endure.

And yet, Eleanor's was different.

I pivoted, dodging another strike, then struck the golem's core in one fluid motion. It crumbled instantly, but I wasn't satisfied.

'Because you've learned to move around pressure rather than resist it, you've never fully tested your ability to withstand it.'

She wasn't wrong. My body had memorized the feeling of overwhelming force—not to overpower it, but to flow through it, like water slipping between cracks. A habit formed out of necessity.

Eleanor's presence had made that impossible.

The gravity-like force she imposed was precise. It wasn't just pressing down on me—it was calculated, shaped to target the very habits I relied on. My usual method of slipping past the weight of an opponent's presence hadn't worked. Every time I tried to adjust, she had already accounted for it, pinning me in place in a way that felt unnatural.

'An enemy who doesn't allow you to adapt.'

I clicked my tongue, irritation flickering through me.

That kind of enemy does exist. I had encountered them before. And if I hadn't been aware of my own limitations before today, I was now.

Another golem lunged, its massive stone body moving faster than it had any right to.

I didn't dodge.

Instead, I shifted my weight, bracing myself against the impact. The force slammed into me like a falling boulder, but I didn't let my body absorb all of it instinctively.

No. Endure it. Test it.

I dug my feet into the ground, feeling the raw strength press into my muscles. My instincts screamed at me to move, to slip past, to do what I had always done—but I resisted.

For a split second, I held my ground.

Then, my mana surged, coiling within me like a tightly wound spring before exploding outward. I redirected the force through my core, twisting my body just enough to dissipate the impact without completely avoiding it.

The golem staggered.

I moved.

One clean strike through its core, and the construct collapsed into dust.

My breathing was steady, controlled, but my fingers twitched slightly.

'You've never fully tested your ability to withstand it.'

I felt my jaw tightening a little.

Eleanor's assessment wasn't just accurate—it had forced me to confront something I had been subconsciously avoiding.

Adapting had kept me alive. It had allowed me to face overwhelming odds, to come out standing when others had fallen.

But if an enemy appeared who could remove my ability to adapt...

'Then what?'

I steadied my breath, rolling my shoulders as I felt the aftershocks of the impact settle into my muscles. The tension lingered, but it wasn't unbearable—it was informative.

Eleanor's words had pointed out a gap in my approach, that much was true. But from that gap, something else had emerged.

I had endured.

The moment I stopped instinctively slipping away, the moment I let myself feel the force—the moment I withstood—I had gained something.

The golem's impact had been immense, but in that split second, when I chose to take the force instead of avoiding it, I noticed something new.

Mana naturally disperses upon impact—normally, I let it guide my movements, redirecting force to minimize damage. That was a passive process, one I rarely had to think about. But this time, as I braced myself, I focused on that moment of collision.

Instead of letting the force be something I evaded, I let it compress within me. My body, my mana, even the foreign energy inside me—it all reacted. The strain didn't just dissipate—it coiled within, stored, waiting for release.

It was familiar.

'Voidborne...'

The power I had inherited from the Void Dragon. The aspect of Void Energy that had resonated within me ever since I had claimed it.

Void isn't just about erasure. It isn't just about destruction.

It is absorption. Compression. The ability to consume force and return it magnified.

The realization settled into me like a locked puzzle piece finally clicking into place.

My body had already been trying to do this instinctively. The habits Eleanor warned me about weren't just reactions—they were partial forms of something greater. I hadn't been dodging only out of caution or experience.

I had been subconsciously seeking the most efficient path to absorb external force, minimizing my losses while maximizing my returns.

And now?

I could refine that further.

The golems activated once more, their heavy steps rumbling through the training ground as new constructs emerged. I turned toward them, rolling my wrist as my mana subtly shifted, coiling around my limbs.

'Let's test this further.'

I sprinted forward.

The first golem swung down at me, its colossal arm crashing toward the ground with brutal force. I didn't slip away, didn't sidestep the impact.

Instead, I braced.

Mana surged through me, and for an instant, I let the force sink into my body. The strain pressed down, my muscles tensed—but instead of resisting, I let it mold itself within me.

And then, I released it.

CRACK!

The stored force surged through my legs as I exploded upward, my counter-strike striking the golem's core with more the impact. The shockwave sent cracks splintering through its frame before it collapsed into dust.

I exhaled sharply.

'It works.'

I took a steady breath, feeling the lingering vibrations in my limbs from the impact. The force had transferred efficiently, but not perfectly.

A faint tremor ran through my muscles, a subtle yet undeniable strain settling deep within my body. I staggered slightly, my footing uneven for just a fraction of a second before I steadied myself.

'Still inefficient.'

The Void Compression concept was taking form, but it wasn't refined—not yet. The force didn't flow as smoothly as it should have. Some of it still clashed against my body rather than being completely integrated, leaving behind residual tension.

I exhaled slowly, letting the tension ease from my limbs as the last of the training constructs crumbled into dust.

The strain wasn't just in my muscles; it was also in my very foundation.

Unlike mana, which naturally circulates and disperses throughout the body, Void energy didn't just move—it.

'I need to understand it better.' And if I wasn't careful, it would consume me as well.

I exhaled slowly, letting the tension ease from my limbs as the last of the training constructs crumbled into dust.

The progress was undeniable. Void Compression was beginning to take shape, but it was still a delicate, incomplete technique—one that required refinement, patience, and above all, control.

There was no point in pushing further today. If I forced something so volatile without fully understanding it, I risked more than just inefficiency—I risked losing control entirely.

For now, this was enough.

I deactivated the training hall's combat settings, the ambient mana in the air slowly dispersing as the simulation shut down. The hum of the chamber's energy faded, leaving only the sound of my own breathing.

With measured steps, I exited the training grounds, making my way toward the academy corridors. The artificial lighting overhead cast long shadows across the pristine floor, a contrast to the raw, weighty atmosphere I had left behind in the training hall.

Breakfast.

I reached into my bag, pulling out the protein shake I had prepared earlier. A simple blend, packed with the necessary nutrients to sustain my body through the demands of training. I twisted the cap open, taking a slow, measured sip as I walked.

The taste was neutral—neither pleasant nor unpleasant. But it did its job.

With each step, I let my body adjust back to normal movement, feeling the subtle aches in my muscles settle into something more manageable. My body had taken strain, but nothing beyond what I could handle.

The academy's hallways were already filling with students, most of them preparing for the first class of the day.

But then as I entered the room I sensed a bunch of gazes on me coming from a concentrated location stating that the gazers were a friend group.

And they were.