

## H. Academy 878

### Chapter 878 - Artifact Training

BOOM!

The impact sent a tremor through the battlefield, dust kicking up as the massive figure of Carl stepped forward, his war hammer resting heavily against the ground. His broad frame exuded sheer power, the faint glow of mana radiating from his weapon as he rolled his shoulders.

Carl.

As if that wasn't enough, the sharp whistling of arrows sliced through the air, forcing Ethan to instinctively duck. His gaze flickered upward, catching sight of a familiar figure perched high on the remnants of a crumbled building, her bow drawn with deadly precision.

Lilia.

Ethan's chest tightened slightly. He had expected a challenge, but this... this was ridiculous.

'Are you kidding me?'

His mind raced as he took in the situation. Carl, a powerhouse who specialized in brute force and area control, and Lilia, an elite archer with unparalleled precision and speed. Both of them were rankers, the type of cadets who could single-handedly turn the tide of a battle.

And what did they have?

Layla—capable, sure, but nowhere near Carl in raw strength. Sylvie—an exceptional enchanter, but not suited for direct combat. And him...

His jaw clenched.

He was the strongest in their team.

Yet, Carl outranked him. Lilia outranked him. Their opponents weren't just strong individually; their synergy was lethal. One controlled the battlefield with overwhelming strength, the other suppressed movement with unrelenting precision.

It wasn't fair.

'Who the hell put this match-up together? How does this even make sense?'

SWOOSH!

Another arrow zipped past, barely missing his shoulder.

Ethan's instincts kicked in. Move. Now.

TAP!

He kicked off the ground, diving behind a fallen pillar for cover as another volley of arrows rained down. The air crackled with tension, the simulation's mana-infused battlefield humming around them. He peeked out, his mind already working through possible counters.

BOOM!

Carl took a step forward, the ground practically trembling beneath his weight. The hammer in his grasp radiated power, mana visibly coursing through it like veins of molten energy.

Ethan's fingers curled tighter around his spear. A tank. A damn near indestructible one.

Sure, in a drawn-out fight, he could probably find a way to chip Carl down. Spear against a heavy weapon. Agility against raw endurance. In a real battle, patience could be his weapon.

But in a time-limited simulation?

'Not happening.'

SWOOSH!

Another arrow whistled through the air. Tch. Lilia wasn't just keeping her distance—she was dictating the fight. Every time he thought about advancing, she shut it down before he even moved.

'One brute to lock us down. One sniper to pick us apart. This is suffocating.'

Ethan exhaled sharply, forcing his mind to focus. He wasn't alone.

"Layla, up to the front!" His voice cut through the chaos.

Layla didn't hesitate, immediately stepping forward, her shield raised.

"Sylvie, enchant her," he continued. "But don't burn through your mana—save some for me."

Sylvie's hands were already glowing before he even finished speaking. Golden light wrapped around Layla's form, reinforcing her defenses with a soft hum of energy.

Ethan's mind whirled.

Irina had scouted Sylvie before.

And if Irina Emberheart thought Sylvie was worth her time.....then Ethan would trust that judgment.

He had no clue how much Sylvie could handle, but she had to be good.

Now, they just needed to shift the fight.

Ethan's eyes locked onto Carl.

'We don't fight him. We delay him.'

BOOM!

Carl moved. Not rushed—just one heavy step forward, but it was enough. Enough to make the air around them feel suffocating, enough to remind Ethan that going through him wasn't an option.

'Damn it. We have to go around.'

His instincts screamed at him. They had to move past Carl and take out Lilia first.

Ethan knew his own limits. Even with his agility, going head-to-head with Lilia was a death sentence if she had the time to set up. And Carl? Carl was a living wall. He didn't need to chase them down—he just had to be there.

Ethan's eyes snapped to Layla.

"Go!"

Layla rushed forward, shield raised, golden mana shimmering around her form. She let out a sharp battle cry as she met Carl's strike—

BOOM!

The hammer slammed into her shield like a meteor, the impact sending a deafening shockwave through the battlefield.

"Ghk—!"

Layla skidded back instantly, boots digging trenches into the dirt. Even with Sylvie's enhancement, the sheer force of Carl's swing made her stumble.

But she held.

Ethan didn't waste time.

TAP!

He shot forward, using the distraction to weave around Carl. Fast, sharp movements, his spear angled low as he closed the distance. Lilia was still perched on the ruins, nocking another arrow—

SWOOSH!

Too late.

The sky darkened with incoming arrows.

Ethan gritted his teeth and kept moving—but then—

RUMBLE!

The ground shook violently beneath his feet.

'Shit—!'

His footing went unstable, the once-solid terrain now betraying him. A controlled tremor.

[Seismic Crash.]

Carl wasn't just a tank—he had control.

Ethan's body tilted—his stance breaking—

'No.'

TAP!

He twisted, spear stabbing into the ground as an anchor.

STAB!

The vibration rattled through his arms, but he didn't fall. Didn't stop. He balanced himself.

But then—

SWOOSH! SWOOSH! SWOOSH!

Arrows. Too many.

Lilia wasn't giving him room to breathe. He barely brought his spear up in time—

CLANG! CLANG!

Deflecting what he could—but some were too fast.

Too precise.

'Damn—!'

Then—

A golden hue.

It wrapped around him, pulsing softly— and the moment the next set of arrows struck—

THUNK! THUNK!

The projectiles bounced away, deflected mid-air.

Ethan blinked.

"...Oh?"

His eyes flicked back toward Sylvie—who was watching him intently, golden energy still trailing from her fingertips.

'So this is what Irina saw in her.'

His grin returned.

'Alright. Let's make this count.'

Ethan didn't waste a second.

Mana surged through his legs, crackling like restrained lightning beneath his skin. His entire body felt lighter, sharper.

Spear of Hartley—Phantom Stride!

TAP!

He vanished from his previous position, exploding forward with a burst of speed.

SWOOSH! SWOOSH! SWOOSH!

The arrows still rained down, but Ethan wove between them, his movements erratic, unpredictable. A blur of motion, cutting through the battlefield like a wraith.

Then he noticed it.

The golden hue surrounding him—it was fading.

Not completely gone, but thinner.

His gaze flicked toward Lilia for just a fraction of a second.

She was adjusting.

'She's altering her mana infusion?'

That was insane. He knew she was a top ranker, but adapting mid-fight to break through Sylvie's enchantments? That was a whole different level.

'Well, I kinda expected that.....This is Lilia after all....' Ethan clenched his jaw.

Then I'll have to do the same.

The spear in his grip shifted. He loosened his stance—let his arms relax just enough.

Then—

TAP! TAP! TAP!

He spun the spear.

The motion started slow, but within seconds, the weapon became a whirling blur in front of him. A makeshift shield—his own countermeasure to the barrage.

Lilia's arrows, already cutting through Sylvie's protection, now had another obstacle.

CLANG! CLANG! THUNK!

Some bounced off the spear's rapid motion. Others barely grazed him.

Not perfect. But enough.

Ethan kept moving.

Lilia's gaze sharpened. She saw the adjustment—and she was already countering again.

She wasn't just a sniper.

She was a duelist.

Ethan exhaled sharply.

This isn't going to be easy.

But that was fine.

He never wanted it to be.

Lilia nocked another arrow. Carl was shifting, preparing to move.

And Ethan wasn't stopping.

He had one job.

Close the gap.

ROOOOAR!

The sound hit him like a tidal wave, reverberating through his skull. Ethan's entire body froze, his instincts screaming at him as his momentum suddenly shifted—not forward, but back.

'What—?'

His legs moved against his will, his body being pulled toward the source of the roar.

Carl.

'Shit—TAUNT SKILL.'

GRAVITY COMMAND—IRON ORDER.

Carl's entire form pulsed with mana, his skill yanking Ethan toward him like a magnet. The moment his feet left the ground, Ethan knew—this wasn't a simple pull. Carl's control over battlefield presence was absolute. He wasn't letting Ethan past him.

He fought against the pull, trying to plant his spear into the ground, but—

SWOOSH!

His gaze snapped toward Lilia just as she released another arrow.

This one was different.

He felt it before he even saw it. The sheer concentration of mana twisting around the projectile, a condensed, spiraling force of destruction. The air itself whistled sharply, almost shrieking as the arrow cut through it.

If that hits, I'm done.

Ethan gritted his teeth, but his body wouldn't move in time. Carl's taunt had him locked in place—his momentum shifting toward the tank instead of dodging the arrow.

'Enemy team is really unbalanced... How unlucky...'

He braced himself.

Then—

A warmth.

A pulse of energy wrapped around his mind, his body.

A sudden clarity.

His body was still mid-motion, but the force pulling him back toward Carl was gone.

Ethan's gaze flicked instinctively to the side—

And he saw her.

Sylvie.

Her green eyes glowed with a golden hue, sharp and unwavering. Mana rippled outward from her, latching onto him, cleansing him.

'Cleansing effect? She had already reached this level?'

This wasn't just basic support magic. This was high-tier state cleansing.

Something that even veteran healers in the Hartley Guild struggled to achieve.

Ethan barely had time to process it.

His body was his own again.

No hesitation.

He moved.

TAP!

His foot dug into the ground, force redirecting just as Lilia's arrow ripped past the space where he had been.

BOOM!

The impact behind him was massive, cratering the earth where the shot had landed.

Too close.

Ethan exhaled sharply.

Sylvie had just saved his life.

His grip tightened around his spear.

'Alright... Now I owe you one.'

His eyes locked onto Lilia once more.

And he sprinted forward.