

H. Academy 919

Chapter 919 Shifting Pillars

"Heh?"

The sound barely left her lips before she moved.

Her body reacted before her mind could fully process the threat. She twisted to the side, her mana-enhanced reflexes kicking in at the last second. A sharp pulse of energy crackled through the air, missing her by mere inches, striking the wooden wall behind her with a sharp explosion of force.

The impact was controlled—not enough to kill, but enough to send a message.

Lilia landed smoothly, bow raised, her crimson eyes flashing with pure, razor-sharp focus.

Someone just attacked her.

And now?

They had her full attention.

Lilia barely had time to reposition before her attackers moved.

Four of them.

She registered their presence in a heartbeat—stronger than first-years, stronger than what she was used to dealing with. These weren't just reckless juniors trying to make a name for themselves. These were cadets. Seniors.

Her crimson eyes flickered as they surrounded her, their mana signatures controlled, refined, dangerous.

What the hell are they doing?

This was the archery grounds. There were surveillance cameras everywhere. Attacking someone openly here wasn't just reckless—it was outright stupid.

But they didn't hesitate.

The first one lunged.

Lilia reacted instinctively, twisting away as a blade of condensed mana slashed past her, slicing through the empty air where she had stood. The moment her feet touched the ground, she had already drawn an arrow, her fingers a blur against the bowstring.

Too close.

She didn't fire. Instead, she used the motion as a feint—a deliberate shift in stance that forced her attacker to react. The moment he did, Lilia spun low, kicking at his legs. The strike connected, disrupting his balance for a split second—

But he recovered too fast.

The second attacker came from behind.

Lilia barely dodged in time as a spear of mana surged toward her back, forcing her to roll into a low crouch. Her mind worked fast—too coordinated, too precise.

These weren't just any cadets.

They had trained together.

Her jaw clenched as she leapt backward, creating distance. The third and fourth opponents cut off her retreat, flanking her with well-timed movements.

Damn.

She loosed an arrow at the one on her right. He dodged, twisting away with speed unnatural for an archer. The way they moved, the way they adjusted—it wasn't just raw strength.

They were trained to fight in a team.

This isn't random.

Lilia exhaled sharply. She didn't have the luxury of questioning their motives now. Not while she was still outnumbered.

The first attacker—a tall male with sharp features and a broadsword crackling with mana—moved in again, his footwork controlled.

Lilia's breath came steady despite the chaos around her, her crimson eyes flickering between her attackers. Four seniors. Strong, disciplined, trained in coordinated combat. They moved with precision, cutting off her retreat, anticipating her movements. This wasn't a spur-of-the-moment attack.

This was intentional.

But why?

Her grip on her bow tightened as she sidestepped another strike, her body twisting to evade the arc of a mana-infused blade. She needed answers.

Lilia narrowed her eyes, her voice sharp as she spoke.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?"

No response.

She shot a glance at the two on her left. Familiar faces.

Her mind worked rapidly, piecing together details in an instant.

Renald Voss. A cadet she had seen before, a rising talent in mid-range combat. He had once spoken about wanting to establish himself among the elite, always shadowing higher-ranked figures within Olympus Vanguard.

Elara Nox. A quiet but deadly archer. Lilia had noticed her before, always watching from the background, always aligning herself with those in power.

Both of them... were already affiliated with her guild.

A cold realization settled in her gut.

They weren't just attacking her.

They had been sent.

Selene.

It could only be her.

Lilia's lips curled in a bitter smirk even as she dodged another attack, barely managing to twist her body out of the path of a mana spear. Of course. Selene wouldn't dirty her own hands. She didn't need to.

She simply whispered in the right ears, set the pieces in motion, and let the board shift in her favor.

And right now, Lilia was the piece that needed to be removed.

Her energy was draining fast. The relentless attacks weren't giving her a chance to counter. Even as she evaded and defended, she was losing ground—step by step, strike by strike.

Another slash came from the right. Too fast.

She barely managed to deflect it with her bow, but the impact sent her skidding backward.

She exhaled sharply, feeling the burn in her muscles. She wasn't just outnumbered. She was being overwhelmed.

Damn it.

She was running out of options.

And then, before she could react—

A sharp pulse of mana exploded against her side.

The force tore through her defense, sending her body crashing against the training platform. Pain shot through her ribs as she hit the ground, her vision momentarily blurring.

No—she had moved to avoid it. She had calculated it right. But—

Lilia forced her gaze up—just in time to see the final strike descending.

Mana surged around them, crackling, lethal.

She was not going to get up in time.

And for the first time that night, she understood—

She was going to lose this fight.

Lilia's body screamed in protest as she forced herself to move. No time. No hesitation.

The strike was coming down fast. Too fast.

Her mana surged instinctively, pushing through the pain. She twisted her fingers against the ground, sending a burst of raw energy into her limbs—not to block, but to redirect.

[Mana Acceleration]

Her body jerked sideways just in time. The attack that should have crushed her chest missed by a breath, slamming into the floor instead, cracking the reinforced stone beneath it.

Lilia didn't stop to recover.

She kicked off the ground, spinning midair and nocking an arrow even as her muscles burned. The mana surged into her fingers, her control sharp despite the exhaustion.

She had no choice.

She had to hurt them.

Her shot exploded forward, its path shifting midair—not one, but two arrows splitting off from the original.

The first arrow sank into Renald's shoulder.

He cursed, stumbling backward as mana flared from the wound, disrupting his balance.

The second arrow pierced through Elara's leg.

She let out a strangled sound, collapsing to one knee.

A sharp pain flared in Lilia's skull, her vision tunneling for a brief moment. She was pushing her body beyond its limits, the repeated use of high-level mana control chipping away at her stamina.

But she had evened the playing field—at least, slightly.

She could still—

CRACK.

Pain erupted along her ribs.

One of them had struck her while she was mid-movement, their mana-enhanced fist crashing into her side with brutal force.

Lilia gasped, barely able to register the blow before another strike hit her from behind.

Her body jerked forward, her knees buckling.

She tried to move—tried to fight—

But they didn't give her the chance.

The next attack came as a violent knee to her stomach, knocking the air from her lungs.

Lilia collapsed onto her hands, coughing, blood spattering against the stone floor beneath her.

Too much.

They weren't stopping.

A boot crashed into her ribs. Another to her back.

She barely registered the world around her anymore, her senses breaking under the relentless barrage. Her vision blurred. The cold air of the archery grounds no longer registered against her skin.

She had lost.

And now, she was being beaten into the ground.

A part of her raged—refused to accept it.

But another part—the part that had always understood how Selene played the game—

Knew this was exactly how she had planned it.

One final, calculated humiliation.

The attacks kept coming.

And Lilia could do nothing but endure.