

Chapter 77 - Training Session

"Last time around, you all showed me what you can do as you are right now," Miss K started her rundown as she slowly walked up and down the little line we had created.

"It was definitely very *eye-opening* in a lot of ways." Her eyes met mine with a smirk, and I couldn't help but cringe at the memory of Kenzie ripping out my eye during our last exchange. I wasn't the only one; I heard Tom groan quietly and felt Kenzie tense up next to me.

"First and foremost, it is very apparent that none of you know what the actual fuck you're doing when it comes to a fight." She let those words hang for a moment, daring anyone to disagree, but we all wisely kept our mouths shut. None of us knew jack-shit compared to Miss K, and we were all painfully aware of that fact.

Seeing no challenges, she nodded to herself with clear satisfaction and continued, "And that's *fine*. That's why you're here in the first place. If you already knew everything there was to know, then there wouldn't be a reason for me to exist. So, in a way, your ignorance is the best I can hope for."

"Now, as for what we're doing today: Like I promised last time, there won't be any one-vs-one fights. Instead, we'll focus on proper conditioning and training. I've created a training regimen specifically designed for each of you, both for during our sessions and for you to take home. The in-session training will be more rigorous and harder, but you won't get anywhere if you think just our time together will be enough to make you into monsters. If you truly want to become one, you'll have to put in a lot of effort outside of our dojo sessions as well."

That was about what I had expected and lined up with everything I knew about muscle training. Three times a week of martial arts training has not made a champion yet, and likely never would.

Miss K started handing out data-shards, two for each of us, as she continued to explain her plans. "The blue one is the in-session shard, so slot it in and start internalising what you'll be doing today. Keep in mind what I said during our first session: There's a high chance that nobody else in your group will have the exact same training regimen, so don't come crying to me when you see someone else doing something different—there's a reason and a purpose behind the way I've designed each and every one of your exercises."

Holding up a yellow shard, before depositing it in Jin's hand, she added, "These yellow ones are for your extracurricular training. They list a bunch of exercises and things you can do outside our sessions to speed up your improvement. While technically not mandatory, I'll be honest: if you don't do at least a decent number of them, the rest of the group will outpace you before you know what hit you. If that happens, I will have no choice but to drop you from the dojo until you can get in with the next group—if you're lucky enough to win the lottery a second time, that is."

Her eyes met each of ours in turn, driving home the seriousness of her words. There was no doubt in my mind that she meant it.

It made a lot of sense too; you couldn't exactly have someone lagging behind on physical conditioning in the same group as people way ahead of them. It would make any and all mock-battles not just inefficient, but downright *dangerous*.

Imagining going up against someone like Kenzie, but with her being even just 10% better than me at everything, was an absolute nightmare scenario. I'd lose more than an eye before Miss K could stop the fight, just by virtue of the fact that the physical gap would be way too large between us.

Slotting in the blue shard and having its contents expand into the partition that I had created just for it—taking Kill Joy's advice to heart, to never, ever trust anyone's data shards, even if you generally trusted the person that handed it to you—I started browsing through the information provided.

To say that it was extensive would be putting it mildly.

I was completely flabbergasted by the sheer breadth and depth of the shard's contents that I saw even at just a glance.

The first folder and data-structure I checked out was the one labelled "TODAY" by Miss K, and what unfurled before me was nothing short of a thoroughly detailed, step-by-step guide on how to train specific movements and techniques.

It wasn't just a simple "step forward and strike the air" or something along those lines either.

Each movement had a complete breakdown of which muscle groups would be engaged, to what degree each one would have to be exerted down to a single-digit percentage accuracy to perfectly emulate what Miss K had in mind and even tips on how to get there based on her observations of my control she had seen during the one-vs-one against Kenzie.

Reading through one of the comments on a particular move—a spinning pirouette followed by a devastating-looking kick—I couldn't help but shudder at how incredibly detailed this all was. There were detailed videos of Miss K doing the exact move, recorded from multiple different angles to give us an idea of what we were working towards.

"This should be a rather simple move for you to learn, as you've already demonstrated good hand-eye-foot coordination in your fight with Kenzie. For starters, you will need to be aware of what this move can do for you and what it can't: It will allow you to convert a horizontal hit aimed at you into an attack, by converting the kinetic energy into rotational force to use for your own kick. This will not work unless you manage to get them to glance with their hit; if they hit you straight-on, you'll simply get your ribs broken or worse. But your spacing was quite good against Kenzie, so I'd imagine there won't be too many issues with this particular move for you, as you'll generally be at the right distance from the enemy as is anyway..."

It went on and on just like this, giving a full rundown for each and every muscle group, how Miss K thought I was stacking up to what was required already, and giving me targeted

advice on how I could get from where I was right now to where I needed to be to copy her movements one-to-one.

It was thoroughly intimidating and downright frightening, to see such an in-depth level of analysis of my own capabilities, considering how little time we had actually spent with Miss K as a whole.

'How did she even get all of our training regimens done in time? This is way too detailed!' I couldn't help but think as the thought hit me that it wasn't just me who had received such a shard, but all four of us. 'I guess that's a Grandmaster for you, huh...?'

Miss K gave us all another five minutes to peruse the contents of the shards before she abruptly clapped her hands together, the loud noise startling us all into attention.

"Alright, I hope that you've all gotten a rough idea of what I'll be expecting from you going forward. For today's session, simply open the "TODAY" folder and start working your way through from top to bottom. If you have any questions, don't understand something, or require more direct help, do not hesitate to ask. I'm here to help and teach, after all. That said, the majority of today's session will be self-study, so find yourself a spot on the blue-marked area and start working through what I've prepared for you. I'll call you back when it's time to move on to the last few minutes of our session today, where we'll be doing a bit of something else."

The dangerous glint in her eyes made me worry a bit about what that "something else" might be, but when she shoed us away to get started, I quickly forgot about it in favour of fully diving into the training.

The blue shard was an absolute goldmine for me, no matter how I looked at it.

My biggest issue with this whole second-life bit so far had been lack of information and proper ways to train. Outside of the System's knowledge downloads, everything I did was basically just a bastard-amalgamation of self-taught knowledge from my past life and first-hand experience in this life of things that worked well or simply didn't work at all.

This shard, however, laid out everything in such minutiae that I found it hard to even wrap my head around some of the training exercises. A complete 180 from my previous issue, but one I'd gladly try to work my way through, as it promised to be vastly better than my current way of doing things.

Putting aside those thoughts for the moment, I opened the cerebral interface again and dived into the "TODAY" folder, opening the first exercise for the day and immediately getting stumped.

'Really, Miss K...?' I couldn't help but groan internally when I read what the exercise was all about. Resigning myself to my fate for the next little while, I started reading and trying my best to internalise Miss K's advice.

In bold letters, it simply said, "LEARN HOW TO THROW A PUNCH."

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As it turned out, learning how to throw an actual punch was a lot harder than I had initially thought.

Sure, I knew the basics like “don’t put your thumb inside your fist” and the general idea of using your full body to transfer momentum into the punch, but having a Grandmaster break down every single mistake you made in excruciating detail was a humbling experience.

It took me around fifteen minutes just to get the basic movements right, even with an extremely detailed step-by-step rundown. I was going through the motions at a snail's pace, not throwing any real punches yet.

Another five minutes passed before the movements became ingrained in my head, and I finally started throwing actual punches at a normal speed. Gradually, I began speeding up to see how hard I could really punch using Miss K’s technique.

Luckily, the dojo was well-stocked with exercise and training equipment, so I had some real numbers to compare, learn from, and strive for. Miss K had set up a punching bag that featured a wireless cerebral connection, giving me live updates on the strength and speed of my punches, the impact force, and all sorts of useful data that I didn’t fully understand yet.

What mattered most to me, though, was the overall force imparted, displayed in psi.

At the start of the session, my go-to punch was around 170 psi. Not bad, considering that it was above what the average adult could punch, though not by much. Given my Body attribute of 5, I had some extra muscle density compared to others my age, height, and weight.

However, professional athletes in my past life could easily hit upwards of 500 psi, so I knew I had a long way to go before I could consider myself a proper fighter.

After my initial dive into today’s lesson and about thirty minutes of work, I tested myself again and was shocked by the difference.

My punches now consistently hit upwards of 230 psi, and I could tell there was still plenty of room for improvement. Even without Miss K’s intervention, I knew I wasn’t converting all the momentum properly or hitting exactly how I was supposed to.

The drastic increase in power was exceptionally exciting.

Just as I was getting ready to delve further into improving this aspect, Miss K ordered us to start working on the second set of exercises outlined in the shard.

It seemed we were getting around thirty minutes for each exercise, likely to prevent us from getting too tunnel-visioned on any single aspect of training.

Now, I was working my way through a series of different martial arts stances, which, to be entirely honest, I had always figured were complete hogwash and only existed for the cameras.

In my past life, I had never taken any martial arts classes, so I wasn't sure what they were even for.

However, Miss K's insistence on their importance quickly made me rethink that impression. If a Grandmaster said they were important, then I didn't have a leg to stand on pretending they weren't.

The first stance I was supposed to learn was called a "horse stance."

I didn't quite get the name since I had never seen a horse stand like this, but it supposedly provided exceptional defensive capabilities against attacks from the sides. Even though I couldn't fully grasp why I needed to stand in such a weird way, I followed Miss K's step-by-step guide to the letter, figuring it would all make sense eventually.

Over the next thirty minutes, I went through a series of stances, starting with the "horse," then moving into "front," "crossed leg," and finally, "open leg."

My legs burned from holding the stances, my muscles protesting against the thoroughly unfamiliar positions. Despite the discomfort though, I thought that I could feel some kind of benefit of each stance, like they were grounding me or improving my balance—but that might have just been a self-fulfilling prophecy, by way of my trust in Miss K's teachings.

The stances also all seemed somewhat interconnected, like they were part of the same school of martial art, but since I had no prior knowledge whatsoever, they might as well have been alien for all the good it did me to recognize that.

Ultimately, the thirty minutes ended, and Miss K once again ordered us to move on to the next exercises, and I was none the wiser.

I had managed to copy the stances to a decent-enough degree, I'd argue, but unlike the earlier lessons about the punches, I already knew that this particular exercise wouldn't actually help me get better at anything combat-related anytime soon.

Moving on to the third exercise for the day, I hoped for something more along the lines of the first but quickly realised it was more stances instead.

'What is with these stupid things?! Should I just ask Miss K about them...?' I couldn't help but think as I sighed ruefully to myself.

The idea of walking up to Miss K and asking my questions, however, made my cheeks start heating up as I remembered our earlier interactions. *'No... Better not ask stupid questions this early. They will definitely become important at some stage, I'll just have to power through for now.'*

I relied on the fact that the Grandmaster knew more about martial arts than me, and I just had to follow her instructions. There was definitely no other motivation for me to skip out on another one-on-one talk with the Sensei, whatsoever.

Not one.

Getting started on the new stances quickly proved to be more enlightening than expected. There were a number of them listed here with all kinds of strange names, but it didn't take a martial arts expert to recognize them as the movements and techniques used by boxers.

'I guess boxing is technically a martial art, now that I really think about it,' I realised as I started assuming the first stance, simply titled "defensive." 'Just because the martial art has become popular enough and turned into a full-on sport for show doesn't mean it's not still a martial art.'

I wondered briefly why I was even learning so many different stances from clearly different martial arts all together, but once again decided to defer any questions until a later date.

There was bound to be a cohesive, unifying thread throughout all of these exercises that I simply hadn't quite grasped yet. Miss K didn't strike me as the type of person to mess around with exercise and training, after all.

The following thirty minutes went by in a flash, much to my surprise, as I learned and emulated a lot of the traditional boxing stances and movements. They seemed a whole lot more useful for my current, self-taught style than whatever the "horse" stuff had been about beforehand, but I wasn't exactly going to become a professional-level boxer anytime soon either.

Moving onto the fourth exercise for the day at Miss K's behest, I was happy to find the pirouette-kick move from before.

I definitely preferred the direct techniques over the weird stance exercises, no doubt about that—and who could blame me, really?

I had to become stronger as fast as possible if I wanted to impress the Operator at the end of the week. I couldn't exactly impress the guy by going into a fucking "horse" stance and just standing there, not even menacingly.

But doing a cool-ass pirouette-kick? Now that could be useful and impressive at the same time!

As I went through the steps of the pirouette-kick, I focused on maintaining balance and generating power from the rotation, just as Miss K's notes indicated. Each attempt felt a little more fluid than the last, and I could almost see the improvement with every spin and kick.

One of the dojo's nearby walls had been transformed earlier in the session by Miss K into a full-on mirror-lined wall. This allowed me to watch my form, correcting mistakes in real-time, making each practice more effective. I hadn't even known that the walls were programmable, but it made a lot of sense in hindsight for purposes just like this.

My new, cool pirouette-kick was making steady progress, but I quickly realised that I was going to hit a wall sooner rather than later. I didn't have the necessary pressure to really imprint the move into my usual combat flow—if one could even call it that; I wasn't exactly an experienced combatant.

I'd need to try it out quite a lot in future combat-focused sessions to really learn how to properly use it. Just as that thought really started to crystallise, however, Miss K's voice broke me out of my rhythm.

"Now then, it's been about two hours since we started, so it's time to change things up a bit. All of you should have finished the basics of your fourth exercise and should have run into a bit of a problem, if you were paying attention. Anyone want to elaborate?"

She looked around expectantly, and Jin raised his hand. Miss K eagerly pointed at him with both hands and he offered a simple, "I need a partner. Can't learn it on my own. Not really."

"Cooooorrrrect!" Miss K celebrated, giving him two thumbs-up, before turning to the rest of us once again. "The fourth exercise requires a partner by design. And, would you look at that, we have exactly four students here, all needing another partner! If that doesn't come out to exactly two groups of two...! What a coincidence!"

The whole group was staring intently at Miss K, waiting for her to give us the orders to continue. Nobody reacted to her antics in any way except silently hoping they would end soon.

Pouting at the lack of reactions, Miss K shooed us back to the blue-coloured area and told us to group up with the person we fought during our last session, before sitting down on a nearby bench in a thoroughly grumpy fashion.

Seeing that, I felt a bit bad, but Kenzie's voice kept me distracted enough not to worry too much about the strange antics of our Sensei.

"So who do we start with? Do you want to go first?"

Snapping my eyes over to Kenzie, I thought for a moment before replying, "Nah, we can work on yours first. I'll need to think about how to actually have you act in order to properly train my exercise in the first place. So what do you want me to do?"

I had no experience in terms of training with other people, so I figured that following Kenzie's lead, who at least had a big sister that might have taught her a thing or two, would help me get a feel for how I could best benefit from this section of the session.

Kenzie started looking around, as if searching for something, before she gestured for me to follow to a more open area of the room.

"I'll need you to fight me, just like you did last time. Specifically the way you kept me from getting close; my current exercise is about a technique that is supposed to help me get close to people, so don't hold back!" She explained with a toothy grin, her canines glinting dangerously in the dojo's light.

"No clawing my eyes out! That shit hurt like hell, last time!" I quickly threw in, as I started backing off a bit and taking my usual stance—I wasn't going to try out any of the new ones quite yet, considering that I had no idea how to even implement them into my usual combat style or what they were even for.

“No kicking me in the face either, then! I’m just trying to get close, not actually win a fight. So no need to really lay me out if I mess up, alright?” Kenzie replied, laying down the rules for this training session.

It all made a lot of sense to me, so I quickly nodded and got myself ready to keep Kenzie at bay as best I could. Being back in the fighting ring with her put me surprisingly at ease, a strange sort of tension falling off of my shoulders that I hadn’t even realised had been there since god-knows-when.

We didn’t need anyone to count us down either, as this was all about Kenzie trying to get close and me trying to keep her from doing so.

There were a few tense seconds where neither of us really seemed to know how to get started, but then, Kenzie dashed forward and we were off to the races. I kicked, punched, jumped, and dashed to keep Kenzie away from me as she continuously tried to close the gap just like she had in the last session.

I hit her primarily in the legs and chest, but every once in a while, I’d hit her face just because it was the only thing I could really reach at the time—much to her chagrin, but she didn’t call foul at any point, realising that I wasn’t doing it on purpose just to mess with her.

Her movements were about the same as I remembered and my [Martial Arts] muscle memory was more than enough to keep her at bay for now.

As we started really getting warm, however, Kenzie’s movements changed more and more and I could tell that she was starting to lean into whatever it was that Miss K had prepared for her in the blue shard.

Her movements kept getting faster and faster, and my attempts at keeping her at bay grew increasingly desperate. It felt like a replay of our last fight—once Kenzie got warm, her speed was terrifying and incredibly hard to counter.

I was just barely managing to keep her at bay, my muscles straining with every move.

Then, suddenly, she stopped in a crouched position, her feet practically digging into the mats below us as her powerful legs coiled up like a spring. The split second it took her to prepare was not enough time for me to come up with a viable plan of escape, despite the fact that it was fairly apparent as to what she was going for.

Pushing off the ground, Kenzie practically flew at me through the air, pouncing like a tiger on its prey. I tried my best to hit her mid-air, kicking as fast and hard as I could, but Kenzie had anticipated my move. She twisted in mid-air like a cat, blocking my kick with her elbow before crashing into my midsection with her shoulder and pushing me to the ground.

“Yeees!” she celebrated, sitting triumphantly on top of my belly as I heaved for air. The impact had completely knocked the wind out of me. Throwing Kenzie off me, which proved surprisingly easy, I rolled to the side and tried my best to regain some semblance of control over my oxygen levels while Kenzie continued to celebrate her victory.

“Nice move,” I managed to gasp out, still trying to catch my breath.

Kenzie grinned down at me, her eyes sparkling with excitement. “Thanks! That was the new one Sensei wanted me to learn—she said I sucked at getting close, so I needed something more explosive, so I can actually use my claws. Looks like it worked pretty well!”

I couldn’t help but laugh despite the ache in my ribs. “Yeah, no kidding. You pounced like a freaking tiger or something. I hope you got some more moves in there, though, because I guarantee this one won’t work the same way twice.”

“You bet!” Kenzie replied with a big smile and extended a hand to help me up. I took it, feeling the camaraderie between us grow stronger. “You did great, though. I really hate how good you are at keeping me out. My legs are killing me from all the kicks. Maybe you could give my shins a break next time?”

As I got back on my feet, I knew I’d have to step up my game to keep up with Kenzie’s relentless improvements. But that was exactly what made the dojo sessions so exhilarating. We were pushing each other to new heights, learning and growing with every sparring session.

“I can always go back to kicking you in the face,” I offered with a serious look on my face. Kenzie’s grimace told me all I needed to know, and I couldn’t help but laugh.

“Alright, my turn. I just need you to fight me like you did earlier, and I’ll see where I can fit in my own new technique. Oh, and feel free to use that tiger-pounce thing again. Let’s see if I can’t find a counter to it in today’s session already,” I said with a determined grin, ready to see just how hard Miss K’s new move was going to be to implement for me...