

CLEAVER OF SIN

#Chapter 141: Star Academy - Read CLEAVER OF SIN Chapter 141: Star Academy

Chapter 141: Star Academy

Within the carriage, Asher sat with a calm ease, his posture relaxed yet exuding a subtle, almost intoxicating allure. There was something quietly magnetic about him, an aura that seemed to draw the eyes without effort.

After fusing with the Star Core Fragment, his already lethal handsomeness and innate charm had not only been preserved but enhanced to a level that bordered on unfair.

Asher did not complain, why would he? Who in their right mind would take issue with becoming more handsome, more beautiful, more captivating to the eyes of others?

His gaze shifted to the open carriage window. Beyond it, the world streamed by in a blur of movement and color, but to his perception, it was almost as if time itself had slowed to a crawl.

Each detail was distinct, sharp, he could count the leaves fluttering on a distant tree if he wished. To him, this journey might as well have been stillness painted over by illusion.

Typically, during journeys of this nature, the carriage would be flanked by knights on horseback, their armor clinking softly as they rode beside it in a protective formation. Their presence served as both shield and deterrent to any who might harbor ill intent.

Yet now, there was none of that.

No rhythmic sound of hooves striking the earth, no disciplined lines of warriors keeping pace.

Yevric, it seemed, was considered by their father to be the only protection they required.

Asher's eyes shifted upward slightly, as though drawn by instinct. With his newly perfected mastery over Astra Control and his deep connection to Star Energy, he could sense Yevric's presence in vivid detail.

It was as though the man carried an ocean of Astra within his veins, each pulse radiating an intensity akin to the Star Core Fragment itself.

"So, Asher, what do you know about the Academy?" Xavian asked, his tone casual, though his black eyes were fixed firmly on his younger brother, who sat across from him.

Asher's gaze left the passing scenery outside the window and settled on Xavian. "I don't know anything about it," he replied simply, his voice uncolored by hesitation.

"It's normal that you wouldn't," Xavienne interjected, her tone flat but her words precise. She sat beside Asher, her posture immaculate. "The estate library contains nothing on the subject."

"Is the Academy so precious or so mysterious that nothing is known about it?" Asher asked, his curiosity genuine.

He recalled visiting the library once, combing through shelves in search of information about the Academy, only to find not a single page dedicated to it. After that, he had seen no reason to waste further time. Whatever he needed to know, he could discover when he arrived there in person.

"It's neither of those things," Xavian answered before his sister could speak. "The Wargrave family simply doesn't care enough about the Academy to keep any records. It's a neutral force, uninvolved in wars, politics, or the usual power games."

"Since you know next to nothing," Xavienne said, her voice taking on a faintly instructive quality, "allow me to tell you what I do know."

"The Academy is called the Star Academy," she began.

"A lazy name," Asher cut in dryly, his expression unreadable.

"Indeed, a lazy name," Xavian agreed with a faint smirk. "But the name is accurate. As it claims, it truly does birth stars. Every single Wargrave has attended the Academy. Even Thalric is there right now."

Asher gave a small nod at that, unsurprised. He had already deduced that the Academy was a rite of passage for members of their bloodline.

"As I was saying," Xavienne continued, clearing her throat, "the Star Academy isn't situated on land, nor in the sky or the sea. It exists in an entirely separate dimension."

"A separate dimension?" Asher repeated, his mind already spinning with possibilities.

"Yes," Xavienne confirmed. "The principal of the Academy governs it entirely. She accepts not even a copper coin from anyone, no tuition, no donations, no financial support of any kind. It is said her spatial abilities have reached the level of the gods, allowing her to create a dimension where life thrives in full."

Asher's thoughts turned inward. 'Rich, powerful, and capable of crafting her own realm... she must stand at the very peak.'

"As I said," Xavienne went on, "the Star Academy takes nothing from anyone, not from nobles, not from the Emperor himself. This is to avoid subtle favors, political entanglements, or invisible strings. Because of this, admission into the Academy doesn't follow the usual process."

"The usual process?" Asher asked, his brows narrowing slightly.

"You know, registering, paying school fees, all the formalities. The Star Academy does none of that," Xavian explained.

Asher's expression shifted, faint confusion visible in his eyes.

"The principal alone decides who is worthy. She sends invitations to those she deems fit to attend, and without exception, each invitee is remarkably talented. How she discovers these individuals is a mystery, though rumors suggest she either wields an artifact or relies on one of her own abilities," Xavienne elaborated.

"It's left to the chosen whether they accept the invitation or not. If they do, no payment is required, everything is provided, free of charge. Some nobles whose children were not chosen have attempted to pressure the Academy in... less than honorable ways. Yet somehow, every such family's bloodline, estate, servants, businesses, every trace of their existence, vanishes, as though they never were."

Asher's mind stilled at the thought. Even their buildings and businesses... gone without a trace.

'Did she erase the point in space where they, and all they possessed, once existed? Such terrifying power.'

"But I received no such invitation," he said aloud.

Xavienne shook her head gently. "You did. It was simply sent to Father rather than to you directly."

"Why not give it to me personally?"

"Well, normally she would," Xavienne replied, "but she couldn't reach you directly. So she went through Father."

"With spatial abilities like hers, entering and leaving any place should be trivial," Asher pointed out.

"That may be true," Xavienne said, "but it doesn't work that way with Father. He possesses an affinity for something... not exactly space, but intimately related to it. Even if she could bypass knights and wards, she would not be able to enter the Wargrave estate without permission."

"Father's affinity is space...?" Asher asked, his surprise plain.

"Not space exactly," Xavian said with a faint, knowing smile. "Something close to it. If you wish to know more, you'll have to ask him yourself."

Chapter 142: Dethronement

Honestly, Asher was getting tired of all this mysterious nonsense. He had asked Malrik and Wuthenya about their elemental affinities before, and both had told him he would find out when he followed them into battle.

And now, these two, Xavienne and Xavian, were refusing to reveal what their father's element was. Everyone was acting as if it were some great, unspoken secret, shrouded in layers of formality and enigma.

But he couldn't complain, well, he could, but it wasn't as if he could punch the truth out of them. Besides, Asher knew that even if they never told him, he could simply ask Lyra, or perhaps any maid within the Wargrave estate, and they would instantly tell him without hesitation.

The thing was, he hadn't asked. It wasn't like he truly cared all that much about it, at least, not enough to make it a priority. But for some reason, now felt like the right time to bring it up.

"But make no mistake, Youngest," Xavienne said, her tone measured yet holding a subtle weight, as she continued the explanation she had been giving earlier.

"Just because everyone receives an invitation," Xavian added seamlessly, picking up the sentence as though it were a relay baton passed between twins, "doesn't mean everyone is admitted. You would still have to prove yourself, through both battle and a test."

"I already suspected as much..." Asher intoned, his voice calm.

"Oh? You already know this?" Xavienne's brows lifted slightly, her lips curving into a faint, calm smile. "I thought you said you didn't know anything about the Star Academy."

"I don't," Asher admitted. "I just know there's no way this supposed Principal would send a bunch of invitations without making the recipients earn their place." His tone was even, almost analytical.

Xavienne and Xavian merely exchanged a knowing look, both smiling faintly at his words.

"Is there anything else I need to know?" Asher asked, his purple eyes shifting to gaze out the window.

"Nothing of great urgency. You will find out the rest once you arrive at the Star Academy..." Xavian said, his voice as calm as ever.

"Where's the fun if we tell you everything now?" Xavienne added with a quiet chuckle. "Wouldn't that make it boring?"

Asher nodded slightly, then asked, "What are brother Malrik's and sister Wuthenya's elemental affinities?"

Xavian's brow furrowed slightly in confusion.

"You don't know this?"

"Am I supposed to?" Asher replied, raising an eyebrow.

"Well, they are... unique," Xavienne said, as though carefully choosing her words.

"Malrik awakened the Sun Element. It allows him to do a great many ridiculous things. He can even bend light to such an extent that he becomes completely invisible, meaning, for all you know, he could be sitting here right now and we wouldn't even notice."

"Indeed," Xavian continued, picking up her sentence without missing a beat. "He even managed to create a personalized healing ability by merging solar energy with human cells on the most microscopic biological level known to mankind."

"It is said that brother Malrik can do a great deal more with his Sun Element," Xavienne added with a sigh. "But we've never actually seen him fight in earnest, nor does he show off his abilities. We don't even know the extent of his katana techniques."

'Why do they keep speaking one after the other like this?' Asher thought, his mind briefly drifting. 'It's as if they share the same brain, or perhaps even the same consciousness.'

His thoughts shifted to Malrik, recalling the man's calm, knowing smile, and the way he carried himself as though he could see through everything and everyone.

'Such talent... Even in a world that isn't technologically advanced, he merged biology with solar energy. And since the Sun is also a source of light, he's able to bend it away

from himself to render himself invisible. And those are just the abilities we know about. Well... not like I'd complain about having an overpowered older brother.'

"Then there's Wuthenya," Xavian said, drawing Asher from his thoughts. "She awakened the Moon Element. She can create and manipulate lunar energy as she pleases, and she can traverse darkness itself. Father once said that if she truly reached her peak, she could even bring the moon crashing into Crymora, if she so wished."

Asher sat stunned.

'One awakened the Sun, the other awakened the Moon... My lightning element doesn't even compare to those two,' he thought grimly.

Then another thought struck him. 'Wait... If these two possess such overwhelming affinities, then Father's must be even more absurd, so much so that they don't even want to mention it. Could it be Space? No... I wouldn't rank Space above Sun and Moon, maybe on the same level, yes, but not above. Time, perhaps? Or maybe even the Star Affinity, given that he possesses golden hair and eyes...'

His guess made perfect sense to him. After all, there was no law stating that only one person could possess the Star Affinity. And even if such a law existed, it wouldn't apply to him, he didn't awaken his Star Affinity naturally, but rather gained it through the Star Core Fragment.

Asher exhaled slowly, feeling a strange mix of humility and determination. Compared to his father, his elder brother, and his elder sister, he seemed... lacking.

'Well... now I possess the Star Element,' he thought, a faint smile touching his lips.

'Should I ask Commander Yevric about Father's affinity to confirm it?' His smile turned a shade sly at the idea.

He turned to the twins and asked, "How long will it take us to get to the Star Academy?"

"Two hours at most," Xavienne replied, closing her eyes as if to rest.

"But we won't be going there directly," Xavian added smoothly. "We'll be heading to another location, from which we'll be teleported into the separate dimension where the Academy resides."

"So..." Asher leaned forward slightly. "Is it that no one actually knows where the Star Academy is located? Or what?"

A troubling thought crossed his mind. What if one day something happened inside that separate dimension, if people were being killed, and no one outside knew the location, how could reinforcements ever arrive in time?

"It is known," Xavienne replied, opening one eye, "but entry is strictly forbidden without the Principal's personal permission, whether you are a Duke or an Emperor."

Asher raised a brow. "Even the Emperor?"

"Even the Emperor," she affirmed.

"Power dictates everything," Xavian said, his tone almost instructional. "With enough strength, one can even ignore imperial orders if they so choose. The Emperor sits on his throne now only because he is powerful, and because none of the Dukes truly care about the throne enough to challenge him."

"If Father were an ambitious man, or even Malrik," Xavienne added casually, "either of them could wage war against the Emperor and take the throne without much trouble."

Her voice was so calm, so matter-of-fact, that it was almost unsettling. She might as well have been discussing the weather rather than casually suggesting the dethronement of the most powerful political figure in the Zarethorne Empire.

Chapter 143: Word Law

If anyone else had overheard Xavienne and Xavian's words, they would have immediately branded them as traitors. But, the twins themselves seemed utterly unbothered, as if the truth in their statements was so absolute that it rendered accusations meaningless.

It was as though, even if the Emperor himself heard them, he would be powerless to do anything about it... directly.

"Why do you look so surprised, Youngest?" Xavian asked with a faint, amused smile.

"Many Dukes have done such things in the olden days," Xavienne said, smirking slightly. "Even in other empires across Crymora, plenty of Dukes and even Marquises have dethroned their own Emperors."

"It all depends on whether you are willing to risk it all," Xavian added, his grin widening as his gaze fixed on Asher. "Win, and you gain everything. Lose, and you lose everything."

"So," Xavienne leaned in slightly, her smirk morphing into a mischievous grin, "what do you think, Youngest? How does prince Asher Wargrave sound to you?"

Asher didn't even know how to respond. One moment they had been discussing the Principal of the Star Academy, and the next, they were casually plotting the dethronement of the Emperor.

He simply sat there in silence, his gaze shifting toward Yevric, who sat atop the carriage roof. The man's expression didn't change in the slightest, no reaction, no flicker of emotion.

He sat there as if, should Azeron Wargrave command it, he would march into the Imperial Castle and tear it apart with nothing but his lance.

Asher's eyes returned to the twins, who were still grinning like maniacs. He finally spoke, his tone flat: "I don't really care."

Their grins slowly faded.

"You're no fun, Youngest," Xavienne said with a sigh.

"Indeed..." Xavian muttered, shaking his head as though disappointed that Asher had no interest in joining them to overthrow the Emperor.

Asher simply stared at them. He couldn't tell if the two were joking or completely serious, and frankly, he decided it was better not to dwell on it.

He was still, in his own words, an overpowered ant. Charging against an elephant was suicide, especially when that elephant could manipulate people's memories as easily as one might flick away dust.

Suddenly, the carriage lurched to a stop as the Enduron horses halted.

Asher was about to ask if they had arrived, though their current location appeared to be nothing more than a sprawling forest, when a rough voice called out:

"Everyone, get down from the carriage and hand over every gold coin and all goods you have, or you will..."

'A bandit?' Asher thought, incredulous.

It wasn't that he was surprised bandits existed, he knew they did. What stunned him was the audacity of a bandit stopping the carriage of a Ducal household, and not just any, but the Wargrave family.

"Brother, sister, are my ears deceiving me?" Asher asked, turning toward the twins.

"They're not," Xavian replied. "It's not that they're fearless, they simply don't recognize the Wargrave family crest. To them, we might as well be barons."

Xavienne nodded in agreement. "But it doesn't matter. Since they've stopped us, intent on robbing us, today will be the day they take their last breath."

Asher began to rise from his seat, but Xavian stopped him. "No need for you to deal with it. Let our personal maid and butler handle the matter."

"I just want to watch," Asher said casually, leaping out of the carriage window.

The maid and butler, who were acting as the carriage's coachmen, were just about to stand and slaughter the bandits when Yevric's calm voice cut through the air:

"Allow this old man to stretch his weak bones a bit."

The two immediately paused, then stepped back. No servant in the Wargrave household would ever think to defy the Commander of the Wargrave Knight Order... well, asides Zarek.

With a faint smile, Yevric rose to his feet. He leapt down from the carriage roof with effortless grace and began walking toward the bandits at an unhurried pace.

There were seven of them, each armed with a different weapon and looking ready for a fight.

"It seems you nobles have been sitting on your high horse for far too long," the bandit leader sneered.

At that very moment, an arrow whistled through the air from one of the surrounding trees. The wind sang as the arrow tore forward, aimed directly for Yevric's temple.

But he didn't even flinch. He moved as though he hadn't seen it, and when the arrowhead struck his temple, it shattered instantly, like a hammer striking glass.

The bandits froze, their eyes wide in utter shock.

Though they were criminals, they weren't fools. They knew when they had crossed paths with an opponent they couldn't possibly defeat. Any one of them could have been killed by that arrow, but this old man had taken it to the head without so much as blinking, and the arrows even shattered to splinters.

Without a word, the entire group turned and bolted, Astra flaring as they launched themselves into the forest in different directions.

"Did I allow you to leave?" Yevric's voice rang out, calm yet carrying the weight of an unshakable decree. "Kneel."

The command crashed over them like a divine law, and instantly, every single bandit, and even the hidden archer, collapsed to their knees.

It felt as though Crymora itself had imposed its will upon them.

Yevric's gaze shifted to the one who appeared to be the leader. His voice was still calm when he spoke next:

"You. Kill all of them, using different methods."

The bandit leader rose to his feet with jerky, unnatural movements, as though his body no longer belonged to him. His eyes widened in horror, but he could not stop himself.

He moved with lethal efficiency. His blade decapitated one of his comrades, sliced another cleanly in half, and tore through the torso of a third. The forest rang with screams, raw, desperate, and agonized, but still, the man's slaughter continued until none of his crew remained alive.

His breath came in ragged gasps, his mind reeling from the horror of killing his own, but his body refused to disobey.

"In your next life," Yevric said evenly, "do not rob, do not rape. Listen to your mother next time, child."

Then, without using Astra, without any visible ability, without even the faintest ripple of power, he simply waved his hand in the air.

The motion unleashed a blast of pure, overwhelming physical force. A shockwave ripped through the forest, and in an instant, the bandit leader's body exploded into nothing but shredded flesh and blood.

Asher stood frozen, his mind struggling to comprehend what had just happened.

"No need to be so surprised, Youngest," Xavienne's voice floated from the carriage window. "What you just witnessed is Uncle Yevric's ability. He calls it 'Word Law.' Anything he says... becomes law."

Chapter 144: Baron Canestane

"No need to be so surprised, Youngest," Xavienne's voice floated from the carriage window. "What you just witnessed is Uncle Yevric's ability. He calls it 'Word Law.' Anything he says... becomes law."

Asher stood frozen for a moment, his eyes following the devastation Yevric had wrought with nothing more than a casual wave of his hand. With his Perfect Astra Control, Asher could sense with absolute certainty that the old man had not even used a single mote of Astra to achieve it.

'Such an ability... and such a physique,' Asher thought, the weight of it settling in his mind.

'Could he simply say "die," and his opponent would drop dead?' His thoughts spiraled, conjuring endless images of the absurd and terrifying possibilities that this so-called Word Law could bring about.

But as quickly as the awe came, so too did his analytical caution. 'There's a major weakness. This ability only works if he actually speaks. If he loses his tongue, then it's useless. And if someone with a sound-based ability completely blocks or nullifies sound, it would be rendered ineffective. Since sound travels through air, someone with enough mastery over air could silence him entirely. But... Commander Yevric doesn't seem like someone careless enough to leave such flaws unchecked. I'd wager he's already devised ways around them.'

Commander Yevric had already turned away, walking back toward the carriage with a soft, satisfied smile, the kind of smile one wears when they've finally gotten the chance to stretch their muscles after a long while.

With a light push off the ground, his boots found the roof of the carriage, and he sat down there with ease, as though it were the most natural seat in the world.

Asher exhaled, shaking his head with a wry expression. 'There are simply too many overpowered people in this world. Reaching the top won't be nearly as easy as I once thought.'

Without another word, he slipped back into the carriage the same way he had exited, through the open window, his movement smooth and unhurried.

The bandits' corpses lay sprawled on the ground, unburied, unacknowledged, and utterly forgotten.

Without pause, the carriage rolled onward and their journey resumed. They did not cross paths with any more bandits, but they encountered numerous monsters along the way.

As always, Yevric merely flicked his wrist or waved his hand, erasing entire packs and waves of beasts in an instant, as though swatting away flies.

Over an hour blurred by in that same fashion, and soon, their carriage approached a town visible in the distance. Through the carriage window, Asher could see a long line of various carriages queued up, each waiting for its turn to pass through the great gates.

"This is the territory of Baron Canestane," Xavienne explained, her gaze also fixed on the sight ahead. "Every year, his lands are used as a gathering point before students are sent to Star Academy."

"This is one of his sources of income," Xavian added smoothly. "With the influx of nobles, knights, commoners, all kinds of people, prices here rise noticeably. Some

people even arrive a month before the Academy's admission date just to avoid the dangers of traveling too close to the deadline. That way, they don't risk a sudden death from bandits or worse, just days before their future begins."

Asher nodded faintly. He didn't need them to spell it out; he could easily imagine how many bandits would see this as the perfect opportunity to strike it rich. After all, plenty of nobles and wealthy travelers would be heading this way, many of them carrying valuables worth a fortune.

It made sense that some would come weeks in advance, willing to spend the extra time rather than gamble their lives on a last-minute journey.

Of course, Baron Canestane's territory wasn't the only gathering point. This same process took place all over the Zarethorne Empire, every region had its own designated admission post. Students merely had to head to the one nearest to their homes.

Their own carriage joined the line, halting in place. Through the window, Asher scanned the queue ahead. Some travelers were on foot, others had a single horse, and more than a few looked utterly exhausted. Many carried bags slung over their shoulders as they trudged forward patiently.

If he hadn't known better, Asher might have assumed some grand festival was about to begin.

"Surprised we weren't given preferential treatment as nobles and allowed to go in instantly?" Xavian asked with a faint smirk, shifting his gaze toward Asher.

Asher simply shook his head. "Not really. I even forgot about that for a moment."

"If it were yesterday, we could have bypassed the line entirely," Xavienne noted. "But today is the official admission day. Everyone, regardless of rank or title, waits their turn."

"See that man in the cloak, sitting on the wall?" Xavian gestured subtly with his chin.

Following the motion, Asher's eyes locked onto a hooded figure whose presence radiated quiet authority.

"If anyone tries to skip the line or cause trouble, he has the authority to disqualify them on the spot," Xavienne said matter-of-factly.

'No wonder none of these nobles are flaunting their status,' Asher mused. 'I can only imagine how many arrogant fools have been thrown out because of their pride.'

He gave a small sigh and shook his head.

His mind, however, drifted back to Yevric. Part of him couldn't help but feel a little disappointed that no powerful enemy had shown up along the road. It wasn't that Asher sought danger recklessly, but the prospect of watching two formidable warriors clash was simply too enticing.

That wasn't too much to ask for... was it?

The line inched forward little by little. Time passed, minutes blending together, until at last their turn came.

At the gates, the guards stiffened to attention, bowing respectfully. The butler and maid, who acted as their coachman and coachwoman, barely spared the guards a glance, simply driving the carriage forward once clearance was given.

Asher's gaze swept over the town with mild curiosity. Even at a glance, he could tell the buildings here paled in grandeur compared to those in the Capital or in the Wargrave Ducal territory. But that was only to be expected, after all, the Emperor resided in the Capital, and a Duke ruled in the Wargrave lands.

Chapter 145: Letter

Asher's gaze swept over the broken and cracked buildings, their fractured walls seeming as though they could collapse at any moment under the weight of their own decay. Dust clung to their surfaces, and faint echoes of a once-thriving town seemed to linger in the air.

The carriage pushed forward with a steady rhythm, wheels creaking over the uneven road.

From the shadowed mouths of narrow alleys, children stood watching, their faces pale and eyes wide. Some merely stood still, silent observers of the world around them, while others sat on weathered steps, their attention fixed on the passing carriages with an unreadable mixture of wonder and weariness.

Asher did not speak; instead, he simply observed in silence. His sharp eyes missed nothing, the small movements of the children, the faded colors of the buildings, the faint scent of damp earth.

Along the roadside, knights clad in armor patrolled in pairs, their movements deliberate and measured, as though their very presence was all that kept the fragile order of the town intact.

"Do you want to look around first?" Xavienne's voice broke the quiet, her tone tinged with mild curiosity as she noticed Asher's curious gaze through the carriage window.

"No," Asher replied flatly, his voice devoid of hesitation.

Though a part of him was tempted to explore, to see for himself the life and decay of the streets, he knew better. The attention his presence would draw as the son of a Duke was not worth the inconvenience. The thought of strangers staring and whispering, their eyes following his every step, left him cold.

Where others of noble blood might relish such attention, seeing it as validation of their status, Asher only ever felt like an exotic beast on display, something caged for the amusement of others.

Xavienne gave a small, understanding nod, and the carriage continued its steady course.

Before long, it slowed and came to a halt before a large building of pale stone. Beside it stood another, smaller structure, where people could be seen coming and going, their pace brisk, their faces set with purpose.

Raising her hand with effortless grace, Xavienne summoned a golden-black envelope into existence. Its surface shimmered faintly, as though reflecting light that wasn't truly there. She handed it to Asher.

"This is your admission letter," she said calmly. "You will be asked for it in that building." Her hand gestured towards the smaller structure they had stopped beside.

Asher gave a simple nod. With a mere thought, the letter disappeared into the storage of his space ring.

At the same moment, Xavienne and her twin brother, Xavian, rose smoothly from their seats. Asher followed without delay. The carriage door swung open, and the maid and butler, who had been waiting outside, bowed deeply, standing to either side in a show of perfect discipline.

The moment they stepped down onto the cobblestone street, a wave of gazes crashed over them. Dozens of eyes fixed upon their figures, sharp and unblinking, as though seeking to pierce through skin and bone. Yet Asher and the twins did not so much as flicker an eyelash in acknowledgment.

They moved forward in silence, crossing the short distance to the second building with effortless composure.

Asher pushed open the large double doors and stepped inside. A spacious hall stretched before him, its polished floor reflecting the muted light from the high windows. At the far end, a table and chair were positioned against the wall, and behind the table sat a woman, her posture impeccable, her expression calm.

A single line extended from her table to the center of the hall. From the bearing of those standing in it, Asher could easily guess they were all invitees of the Academy.

The sound of the doors closing behind him drew attention. Heads turned toward the entrance, eyes narrowing in curiosity, then widening in shock.

"The Wargraves are here," someone murmured, the words carrying through the hall despite their low tone.

"Is that the Tenth Sun?" another whispered. "I'd heard rumors he would attend, but didn't he only awaken on his third attempt? How could he survive the Academy with such poor talent?"

"I heard he defeated the son of a Duke. Doesn't that mean he's talented?" a voice asked, laced with genuine confusion.

"Please," another scoffed, "everyone knows Ryan Silvershade is barely talented. Without his Bloodline abilities, even a commoner could defeat him."

"Exactly. Even the Star Academy didn't bother sending him an invitation, it was his twin sister who received one," someone else added in a conspiratorial tone.

One girl sighed softly. "Still... isn't the Tenth Sun far too handsome? Even the Third Sun and Third Moon standing beside him pale in comparison."

Her companion shot her a horrified look. "Are you insane? Do you want us to lose our heads before we've even entered the Academy?"

Asher heard every word, every insult, every praise, every speculation, but neither he nor the twins reacted. His face remained unreadable as he took his place at the end of the line.

"Since we've escorted you this far, it's time for us to take our leave, youngest," Xavian said, his voice calm but final.

"Say hello to Thalric," Xavienne added, her tone neutral, her face giving nothing away.

Asher inclined his head slightly in acknowledgment. Without another word, the twins turned and departed, leaving the building with a swiftness that suggested they had no desire to remain within Canestane territory a moment longer than necessary.

The line inched forward steadily. One by one, the woman at the table attended to each person, and they would then head toward a door on the left side of the room. Though Asher could feel the occasional glance being thrown in his direction, he paid it no mind. His gaze remained fixed ahead, his expression a mask of indifference.

Minutes passed. Finally, it was his turn.

"Letter," the woman said plainly, her voice carrying the calmness of someone used to being obeyed.

Without a word, Asher retrieved the golden-black letter from his space ring and handed it to her. She tore it open and pressed it against an orb, roughly the size of a basketball, resting on the table.

"Asher Wargrave, correct?" she asked.

"Correct," Asher replied in the same flat tone as before.

Within the orb, his name and likeness appeared in the form of a holographic image, confirming his identity.

"You may proceed to the next room. Next," the woman instructed, already turning her attention to the person behind him.

Asher walked toward the door to his left, the one everyone had been entering from the start.

Beyond it lay a chamber filled with people waiting in silence. Some sat with eyes closed, perhaps meditating or simply resting; others leaned against the walls, attempting to appear nonchalant.

His purple eyes swept the room, taking in every detail. With only a glance, he could distinguish between nobles and commoners, the cut of their clothing, the way they carried themselves, the subtle arrogance or humility in their posture.

Several heads turned toward him as he entered, but he ignored them completely.

Moving with calm, deliberate steps, he selected a seat in a shadowed corner. Lowering himself gracefully, he crossed one leg over the other. Then, as if shutting out a world too dull and flawed to hold his attention, Asher closed his eyes.

And in that stillness, he waited.

Chapter 146: William

Although Asher had closed his eyes to the world, it seemed that the world, in turn, had not closed its eyes to him.

Somewhere ahead, the faint sound of measured footsteps reached his ears, each one deliberate, unhurried, and calm. Through his Omni Perception, which allowed him to sense every minute detail within the chamber with flawless clarity, Asher perceived the figure approaching.

His eyes remained closed, yet nothing escaped his awareness, the faint swish of clothing, the measured pace, the unchanging rhythm of breathing.

The moment the figure came to a stop before him, Asher's eyelids lifted, revealing a sharp, discerning gaze. Standing before him was a boy of about five feet eight inches in height, with neatly kept black hair and deep, equally black eyes that seemed to hold a certain refined composure.

Even without exchanging a word, Asher could already tell that this boy was of noble birth, something in the way he carried himself, the subtle tilt of his chin, and the understated confidence in his expression.

Which noble house he belonged to, however, Asher neither knew nor particularly cared to know.

"It's nice to finally meet the Tenth Sun. It is an honour," the boy spoke, his voice steady, his noble-like smile perfectly polite and practiced.

Asher, however, did not return the smile. Though he was capable of smiling and engaging in conversation when he wished to, that was reserved for people he actually knew or considered worth his time.

Here, in this place, he knew no one, and thus saw no reason to wear a mask of friendliness.

"Who might you be?" he asked, his tone perfectly neutral, neither hostile nor welcoming, merely steady, as though the answer mattered little.

"It seems I've made a blunder by not introducing myself first," the boy replied with a light chuckle. "My name is William Canestane, first and only child of the Canestane family." As he spoke, William extended his right hand toward Asher, offering a handshake.

Asher's gaze dropped to the extended hand.

Though it was merely a handshake, his wariness did not waver. In a world like Crymora, where the smallest gesture could carry lethal consequences, caution was a habit one could not afford to discard.

He had not forgotten how the Emperor had once attempted to tamper with his memory with nothing more than a simple tap on the shoulder, nor how Commander Yevric had decimated an entire wave of monsters with a mere flick of his wrist.

Such displays had etched into Asher's mind a firm reminder: in this world, even the simplest gesture might hold deadly intent.

Of course, the Emperor and Commander Yevric were beings of extraordinary might, while the young man standing before him was merely a noble heir. If William tried anything, Asher was confident he would notice immediately.

At last, Asher's hand rose, meeting William's in a firm yet calm handshake. "Nice to meet you," he said.

"The pleasure is mine," William replied warmly, his own tone steady. Without further ceremony, he sat down nearby, as though they were already old friends sharing a moment together.

"Why did you want to meet me?" Asher asked, his voice as direct as ever.

"Nothing in particular," William said with a casual smile. "Who wouldn't want to meet a Wargrave? My father is merely a Baron, after all."

Asher's eyes lingered on him for a brief moment before he gave a small nod.

It was true, most Barons chose to have only a single child, so as to avoid messy disputes over succession in their relatively small domains.

However, a few still chose to have two children, as insurance, in case fate claimed one too early.

Noble titles, after all, could only be passed down through blood. Even if a childless Baroness adopted an heir, that heir could not inherit the title unless they shared the bloodline.

As Asher began to lower his eyelids once again, William's voice interrupted his thoughts.

"Do you want to explore the Canestane territory? As the next heir, I know every inch of this land."

"Are we even allowed to leave?" Asher asked, curiosity slipping into his tone.

"We are," William replied smoothly. "We aren't prisoners, after all."

"What if the Academy leaves without us?" Asher asked, his voice steady but probing.

"The Academy won't leave until five in the late afternoon. As long as we're back before then, we won't miss our departure," William said with that same calm smile.

'System, what's the time?' Asher asked inwardly, addressing the ever-present clock... system in his mind.

[2:01 p.m., Host] the system chimed promptly.

'So, three hours then,' Asher thought.

"I'm afraid I'll have to decline the offer," Asher said at last. "Perhaps another time."

William's brows rose slightly in mild surprise, but he made no effort to press further. Instead, he simply nodded.

Although Asher technically had more than enough time before the Star Academy staff departed with their students, he was not about to risk being left behind over something as trivial as touring a Baron's lands.

That would be the height of foolishness, perhaps even worthy of being remembered as one of the greatest blunders in Crymora's history.

While Asher knew little about the Star Academy itself, the simple fact that every Wargrave before him had attended was reason enough to ensure he did not miss his own opportunity.

And then, there was the matter of the Principal, the woman so often praised and spoken of with such reverence. Asher found himself curious to meet her in person.

Since entering the chamber, Asher had noted the absence of the Ducal heirs. Not that he particularly desired to meet them, such encounters meant little to him, but he suspected they had chosen to head to admission territories closer to their respective Ducal lands.

Time moved steadily forward, the rhythmic sound of the chamber door opening and closing marking the arrival of more people. New students entered, some choosing to sit quietly, others breaking into lively conversation with acquaintances they already knew.

Through his perception, Asher noticed that more than a few stole glances in his direction from time to time. It did not bother him. If he were someone else, he too might have found himself looking at... well, himself.

After all, it was not every day one encountered a person possessing both such a face and such a status.

His thoughts drifted to the Royal twins, Vaelra and Vaelric Lux Vanthelmor.

He wondered just how powerful they truly were, and his mind began to wander further, to the heirs of the other Dukes. Their bloodlines alone were enough to mark them as exceptional, perhaps even terrifyingly so.

A small smile tugged at the corner of his lips. Though he was two years late to the awakening, giving everyone else a considerable head start, Asher felt no insecurity. If anything, he was certain he had already caught up to, or perhaps even surpassed, the majority of them.

He looked forward to the inevitable battles within the Academy's walls.

Would the nobles attempt to intimidate or control the commoners through sheer status?

Would bullying be rampant? Was killing permitted in the Academy's duels or trials? What subjects would be taught? Would techniques be handed out freely, or would one have to earn them through effort?

Was the Star Academy truly the neutral force it claimed to be? Or were some of its lecturers quietly serving the agendas of powerful noble houses behind the scenes?

One by one, these questions swirled through his thoughts, each carrying the promise of answers that only time, and the Academy itself, could provide.

Chapter 147: Vanish

Asher's thoughts shifted to the principal.

What if she were an evil woman who intended to use every student present as part of a ritual to summon a Demon God? Or perhaps something even more terrifying, an Eldritch Entity, after which calamity would inevitably befall Crymora.

He shook his head at such ridiculous speculation, a faint chuckle echoing in his mind.

'It seems I've gone mad, always expecting trouble or disaster to unfold wherever I step,' Asher mused silently.

He had entertained such thoughts on numerous occasions. There were the times he imagined his own siblings sending assassins after him; the incident at The Orchid Auction House when he half-expected someone to attack; and most recently, the ambush the thought would befall him, the Third Moon, and the Third Sun during their journey.

'It's as though I can't stop seeking chaos or battle... This Wargrave Bloodline is truly turning me into a battle fanatic,' he thought with a mental sigh.

'System, is there a way to remove these side effects of the Bloodline?' Asher asked inwardly.

[Ding]

[The System advises the Host to stop blaming the innocent Bloodline and instead embrace his battle-loving personality]

The familiar chime of the System rang in his mind.

'Tsk. Lazy system,' Asher muttered inwardly, clicking his tongue in mild disappointment.

Of course, he was only joking.

Deep down, he knew there was nothing inherently wrong with the Wargrave Bloodline. He merely wanted to see what the System would say. After all, his System was notoriously sarcastic and often acted as if it demanded payment before doing any real work.

Pushing aside thoughts of his sarcastic sometimes obstinate companion, Asher reminded himself of its usefulness. Lazy as it was, the System had helped him achieve numerous things. Without it, he would never have obtained the Star Code Fragment in the first place.

'Perhaps I should visit the Blessed Land, or the Cursed Land, as others call it,' Asher considered. 'Although nothing of value has ever been reported from there, with the System's aid, I might stumble upon another hidden treasure.'

But another thought came to him. 'Just because people claim nothing useful has been found doesn't mean it's true. Someone could have discovered something priceless and simply kept it secret. After all, in a world like this, if you announce such a find, you'd likely cease to exist within the hour.'

His eyes shifted toward the door just as it opened, revealing a young woman entering with unhurried, measured steps. She did not so much as glance at anyone present. Instead, she quietly sat down, crossed her legs, and closed her eyes as though sealing herself away from the room.

Asher's gaze drifted away from her. Xavian and Xavienne had once told him he would need to pass a test, possibly even fight, to earn his place at the Star Academy.

'Would it follow the usual cliché?' he wondered. 'A written exam first, followed by battles against one another, or perhaps against monsters?'

However, he quickly realized he had no idea how a written exam would even work in this world. After all, there were no formal schools in the traditional sense.

'General knowledge, perhaps? Maybe they'll ask easy questions about historical events,' he speculated.

But almost immediately, he shook his head, discarding the thought. While he had read a great deal about this world's history, he could hardly claim to know everything.

If a question appeared that he couldn't answer, he already had a solution, he would simply cheat. With his Omni Perception, he could observe everything happening within range, including the answer sheets of other students.

'I'm not so self-righteous as to pretend I can't cheat on an exam. That sort of moral grandstanding is for the gullible,' Asher thought with a faint mental smirk.

In his previous life, he had never cheated, relying solely on his overwhelming intelligence to excel. But here, he wouldn't hesitate for a moment if it meant securing a perfect score.

After all, he always had a perfect score in every exam, back at his former world, that wouldn't change just because he changed worlds.

With that decision made, he leaned back and closed his eyes, as though attempting to shut out the ugliness of the world around him once more.

But fate, as always, seemed determined to interrupt him.

"So, Tenth Sun, I heard you awakened on your last try. Is that true?" William's voice broke the quiet.

The question drew immediate attention. Conversations halted mid-sentence, and those who had been speaking turned their heads toward Asher.

'Sigh... this guy... Was he sent by the devil himself to torment me?' Asher lamented inwardly.

Opening his eyes, he replied evenly, "Yes, I failed my first two awakenings. I'm extremely certain that's public knowledge by now. Why ask again?"

"Ah, I don't mean to offend," William said quickly, his tone calm. "It's just that many believe you hid your awakening after you defeated Ryan Silvershade at the Royal Party."

Asher tilted his head slightly, genuine confusion in his expression. This was the first time he had heard such a rumor. He shook his head and responded, "If you pass the Star Academy exams, you can call me Asher."

William blinked in surprise, pausing for a few seconds before smiling and nodding. "I hope you won't take back those words later."

It might seem like a trivial exchange to an outsider, but very few were ever on a first-name basis with a Wargrave. Those who were could be counted among their closest allies or friends.

By allowing William this privilege, conditioned on his success, Asher had, in a subtle way, acknowledged him as a potential friend.

How many Barons could claim closeness to a member of a Ducal family? The answer was none.

If William's father heard those words, he might immediately pass down the Baron title to his son, provided he succeeded in the Academy trials.

Even if Asher never became Duke of the Wargraves, he would undoubtedly remain a powerful Elder, and a formidable one at that.

A few people in the room frowned at the exchange, fleeting jealousy flickering in their eyes as they glanced between Asher and William. William, for his part, merely smiled back with polite composure.

Time seemed to blur, until the door opened again, this time, not for another student, but for the woman who had attended to them earlier, verifying the identities of each Star Academy candidate.

The moment she entered, every student rose from their seats, their attention fixed solely on her. Without preamble or unnecessary words, she spoke plainly.

"We are leaving."

There was no explanation, no elaborate introduction, just a simple statement of fact.

A scroll appeared in her hand. As Astra flowed from her palm into the parchment, it tore in half on its own. A blinding white light burst forth, swallowing every single one of the hundreds of students gathered in the chamber.

When the light faded, the vast room stood completely empty. Everyone had vanished.