

ShadowBound 135

Chapter 135: Leagues Ahead

The students exchanged wary glances, unsure if Magnus was actually serious for once or just setting them up for another round of his biting humor. He started pacing in front of them, his boots crunching against the gravel with deliberate slowness.

"Now, listen closely, because this is probably the only time I'll bother to teach you anything of value," he began, his tone laced with mock solemnity. "Today, we're diving into the art of unpredictability. Or, as I like to call it, the fine line between genius and absolute chaos."

He stopped abruptly, turning to face them with a gleam in his eye. "You see, most of you fight like you're trying to impress a bored audience. Predictable, dull, and utterly forgettable. But in a real fight? Being predictable gets you a front-row seat to your own funeral."

Magnus picked up a stick from the ground and twirled it lazily in his hand. "Take this stick, for example. To you, it's just a stick. But to someone with creativity and a touch of insanity, it's a dagger, a staff, a distraction... or even a cookie fetcher, if you're clever enough."

The students remained silent, some nodding cautiously while others tried to decipher if he was being metaphorical or just hungry again.

Magnus smirked, clearly enjoying their confusion. "Here's the lesson: Stop thinking like warriors and start thinking like opportunists. Use everything—your environment, your opponent's arrogance, and even your own stupidity—to your advantage. Because in the end, survival doesn't care if you're honorable. It only cares if you're alive."

He tossed the stick to Liam, who caught it midair with ease. "Show me what you've got, dagger boy. Surprise me... or bore me. Either way, I'll have something to laugh about."

The students stepped back instinctively, sensing that this "lesson" was about to turn into a spectacle. Liam, however, didn't hesitate. He sized up Magnus with a calm gaze. Magnus grinned wider, his excitement barely contained.

"That's the spirit," he said, rolling up his sleeves. "Now, let's see if you can turn chaos into art—or if you're just another predictable disappointment."

Liam tightened his grip on his wooden daggers, his eyes locked onto Magnus. His opponent twirled the small stick in his hand like a toy, his smug grin practically daring Liam to strike first.

Without warning, Liam darted forward, his movements a seamless blend of instinct and calculated precision. He aimed low, intending to strike Magnus's knees and unbalance him. It was a feint—his real target was Magnus's ribs.

But Magnus moved with almost supernatural ease. He sidestepped the low attack and tilted his body just enough for Liam's follow-up strike to miss, all while spinning his stick lazily.

"Not bad," Magnus said, his tone annoyingly casual. "If I were blindfolded, drunk, and had only one leg, I might've felt that."

Liam's jaw tightened, but he didn't let the taunt get to him. He shifted his stance, attacking from a different angle. He unleashed a series of rapid strikes, mixing his natural aggression with the technical precision Max had drilled into him. Each strike was aimed at a vital point, and his movements flowed like water, unpredictable and relentless.

But Magnus didn't even break a sweat. He parried Liam's attacks effortlessly, using the stick like it was an extension of his body. Every block and deflection was precise, economical, and maddeningly effective.

"You're fast," Magnus remarked, casually tapping Liam's wrist with the stick to disrupt his rhythm. "But speed means nothing if you don't know where to aim."

Liam growled under his breath, switching tactics. He feigned a retreat, then pivoted sharply to deliver a spinning kick aimed at Magnus's torso. It was a move that had caught even Max off guard during their spars.

Magnus, however, didn't even flinch. He leaned back just enough to avoid the kick, then flicked the stick upward, striking Liam's exposed shin. The sharp sting made Liam stumble, and before he could recover, Magnus had already closed the gap.

"Lesson one," Magnus said, his voice low and almost teasing, "your body will betray you if your mind isn't quicker."

With a single fluid motion, Magnus swept Liam's legs out from under him. Liam hit the ground hard, but he rolled away before Magnus could press the advantage.

Magnus raised an eyebrow, impressed despite himself. "You've got guts, I'll give you that. Most would've stayed down after that."

Liam didn't respond. Instead, he shifted into a defensive stance, his daggers held low but ready. He focused on Magnus's movements, trying to find any opening, any weakness.

Magnus smirked, his stick tapping lightly against his palm. "Good. You're learning. But let me show you the difference between trying to keep up... and being leagues ahead."

In a blur of motion, Magnus attacked. Liam barely had time to react as the stick moved like a lightning bolt, targeting his wrists, ankles, and ribs with pinpoint accuracy. Each strike was light but deliberate, designed to throw Liam off balance and leave him vulnerable.

Liam tried to counter, but Magnus's speed and precision were overwhelming. His stick seemed to be everywhere at once, blocking, striking, and redirecting Liam's every move.

It wasn't just skill—it was mastery. Magnus wasn't just fighting Liam; he was dismantling him piece by piece, exposing every flaw in his technique and exploiting every hesitation.

After a particularly sharp strike to his wrist, Liam's grip on one of his daggers faltered, and the wooden weapon clattered to the ground.

Magnus stepped back, spinning the stick between his fingers. "And lesson two," he said, his tone almost gentle now. "Fighting isn't just about strength or speed. It's about control. Of your weapon, your body, and most importantly... your mind."

Liam stood there, panting, his remaining dagger trembling slightly in his hand. Despite the sting of defeat, he couldn't help but respect the sheer skill Magnus had displayed.

Magnus stopped spinning the stick, now turning to the rest of the students who had been watching the little demonstration in stunned silence. He spread his arms wide, a cocky grin plastered across his face.

"And that, my precious collection of underwhelming misfits, is how you fight," he declared, his voice echoing across the training grounds.

The students exchanged uneasy glances, unsure whether they were supposed to be impressed, motivated, or just terrified. Magnus didn't seem to care. He sauntered back toward the center of the group, his stick now tucked casually behind his back.

"Did you see it? The elegance? The finesse? The utter domination with nothing but a stick?" he asked, his tone dripping with self-satisfaction. "That, my dears, is what mastery looks like. You don't fight with your muscles, you fight with your mind—which, judging by the looks on your faces, might be a problem for some of you."

Dylan, unable to resist, raised a hand with a grin. "So... does that mean we all get sticks now? Because I think I could do some serious damage with one."

Magnus smirked, pointing the stick at Dylan. "Oh, I'd pay to see that, blondie. But no, you're not ready for the power of the stick. You can barely handle yourselves with proper weapons."

Dylan leaned back with a mock sigh. "Tragic."

Magnus turned his attention back to the group as a whole. "Let me make this clear: strength fades, speed falters, and even the best weapons can break. But skill? Skill stays with you. It grows, evolves, and becomes your greatest weapon. If you think swinging harder or running faster is enough, then you're wasting everyone's time—especially mine."

Ariana raised a hesitant hand. "But Sir Magnus, isn't strength important too? I mean, you can't win a fight if you can't overpower your opponent."

Magnus's grin widened. "Ah, good question, bookworm. But here's the thing—power without precision is like a sword with no edge. It looks impressive, but it's useless when it matters. Take dagger boy over here." He gestured to Liam, who had finally caught his breath. "He's got power and instincts, sure. But he's raw. He relies on aggression when he should rely on strategy. That's why I turned him into a punching bag just now."

Liam looked at him, unbothered by his words.

Magnus shrugged. "Don't look so gloomy, dagger boy. You've got potential—more than most of these lot. You just need to learn how to think, how to control the battlefield, and how to turn every disadvantage into your weapon. Once you figure that out, you'll be dangerous. Maybe even to me. Someday... or never."

The students murmured among themselves, some nodding in understanding, others still trying to process the lesson.

Magnus clapped his hands together, drawing their attention back. "Now, pair up! And continue sparring, and for the love of the Gods, stop swinging like you're chopping firewood! Use your heads for once. If I see anyone trying to brute force their way through, you'll be sparring me next."

The students scrambled to find partners, the memory of Liam's brutal lesson fresh in their minds. Magnus leaned back against a nearby post, arms crossed, watching them with a satisfied smirk.

"Finally," he muttered to himself, "maybe they'll start learning something."