

ShadowBound 149

Chapter 149: Theory Exam 2

The exam hall was a battlefield of brains, and every student was a soldier armed with pencils, erasers, and varying levels of desperation. Dylan, who had been whining incessantly earlier, was now eerily quiet. His head was bowed low, his pencil scribbling furiously as if his very life depended on it.

Asher, glancing over, muttered to Max, "What happened to him? He was practically crying a minute ago, and now he's in some kind of exam trance."

Max shrugged, whispering back, "He looks like he's been possessed by the ghost of an ancient scholar. I don't trust it."

Meanwhile, others in the hall were visibly struggling. Charlotte, seated near Ariana, was biting her lip in frustration. Her paper was filled with scribbles and half-erased answers. "This is ridiculous," she whispered under her breath, her curls bouncing as she shook her head. One of the questions—Explain the relationship between light magic and spatial distortion in ancient warfare—made her feel like she was reading another language.

"Psst, Ariana," Charlotte whispered, casting a pleading glance at her friend.

Ariana glanced over and whispered back just loud enough to be heard. "It's about how light mages in ancient battles used their magic to bend enemy formations. Think of it as creating mirages to confuse their opponents."

Charlotte blinked, barely absorbing the information. "Right. Mirages. Got it. Thanks." She jotted down something vaguely related, hoping for partial credit.

But Ariana's assistance was limited. The professor's hawk-like gaze roamed the room, her small glasses reflecting the dim light of the hall. Ariana couldn't risk being caught helping too much, leaving Charlotte to wrestle with the rest of the paper.

Sheila, seated at the far end of the room, was faring better, though not without her own struggles. Her focus was unwavering, but some of the questions hit her like a ton of bricks. She furrowed her brows,

her pen tapping against her chin as she tackled a particularly challenging section about demon hierarchies.

"The difference between a Greater and Lesser Demon's myst core structure is..." Sheila read, her stomach sinking. Her mind raced through her studies, recalling every diagram and lecture. She managed to scrape together a coherent answer but not without a grimace.

Right behind Dylan, Asher and Max were in their own little world of chaos. Asher's usual confidence had been replaced with visible frustration, his once-pristine paper now covered in scribbled-out answers. Max leaned over slightly, whispering, "Hey, what's the answer to number five?"

"Beats me," Asher grumbled. "I'm still stuck on number three. Something about beast myst interactions? What does that even mean?"

"Hell if I know," Max replied, his voice a blend of irritation and defeat. "This is a disaster."

Asher shot a glance at Dylan, who hadn't spoken a word since the exam started. His blond-haired friend looked like a zombie—pale, hunched over his desk, and writing at a pace that defied human limits.

"Should we ask Dylan?" Max suggested half-heartedly.

Asher followed Max's gaze to their blond comrade, then shook his head. "Look at him. He's not human anymore. Whatever spirit is keeping him alive, let it do its thing."

Meanwhile, Liam, ever the lone wolf, sat five seats to Dylan's right, completely isolated. He wasn't struggling as much as some of the others, but even he found certain questions mentally exhausting. His eyes scanned the paper, his mind working through sections history questions and elemental magic questions.

"This is unnecessarily complicated," Liam thought, his pencil scratching the paper. "If they wanted to torture us, they should've just said so."

Despite his internal complaints, Liam managed to maintain his composure. He didn't bother looking to anyone else for help; he knew he was too far away, and besides, he preferred to rely on himself.

As the minutes dragged on, the room was filled with the sound of pencils against paper, the occasional cough, and the faint whispers of desperate students. The tension was palpable, and even the air seemed heavy with the weight of unanswered questions.

Dylan, however, remained the enigma of the room. For someone who had been so vocal about his dread earlier, he was now a silent, unstoppable force, plowing through the exam like a man possessed. It was almost unnerving.

By the fourth hour, Asher leaned back slightly, muttering under his breath to Max, "If Dylan actually passes this, I'm buying him dinner. There's no way he's pulling this off legitimately."

Max snorted. "If he passes this, I'm questioning my entire existence."

The professor's voice cut through the murmurs, sharp and unforgiving. "Mr. Samson, Mr. Hawthorne, if I hear another word from either of you, your exam will be marked incomplete."

Both boys immediately straightened in their seats, exchanging a silent look of mutual suffering.

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By the sixth hour of the exam, Dylan finally leaned back from his hunched-over posture, letting out a dramatic groan as he stretched his arms above his head. His joints cracked audibly, drawing a few annoyed glances from nearby students. He smirked, clearly unbothered.

"Well, that's about all I've got," he muttered, tossing his pencil onto the desk with exaggerated finality. "If the examiners think there's more to write, they can finish it themselves. I've done my civic duty."

He glanced at his paper, nudging it to the side of his desk with an air of accomplishment—or perhaps surrender. A slow, mischievous grin spread across his face as he leaned back in his chair, arms folded

behind his head. "Now then," he whispered to himself, "time to revisit that dream I was having about Mystica before daybreak. A beautiful, magical reunion awaits."

With that, Dylan slumped forward, folding his arms on the desk and resting his head down. Within moments, he was off, a perverted smile creeping onto his face as his breathing slowed. The subtle twitch of his lips hinted that whatever he was dreaming about was entirely unsuitable for a public setting.

Asher and Max exchanged looks of pure disbelief.

"Did he just...?" Asher began, his brow furrowing.

"Yup," Max replied, his voice flat. "He just finished early and fell asleep. During the exam."

"Is this even the same Dylan?" Asher muttered, staring at the blond with a mix of awe and irritation.

"For a moment, I almost regretted not asking him for help," Max said, scratching the back of his head. "But then I remembered—this is Dylan. He probably just wrote a bunch of nonsense. If we copied his answers, we'd be expelled by tomorrow."

As the clock ticked down, the tension in the room rose to its peak. By the time the professor rang the bell to signal the end of the seventh hour, the collective sigh of relief from the students was nearly deafening.

The reactions were varied but telling. Some students slumped back in their seats, their faces etched with exhaustion and quiet despair, as if silently praying to whatever deities they believed in. Others looked like they had discovered the secrets of the universe, only for the exam to end too soon. While others like Ariana, sat neatly as if the exam had been no more than a routine exercise.

"Place your papers at the edge of your desks," the professor instructed. Once everyone complied, she raised a hand, and with a flick of her wrist, a gust of air magic swept through the room, collecting all one hundred papers and arranging them into a neat stack that floated beside her.

"You are dismissed," she announced. "Enjoy the rest of your day—and prepare yourselves for the three-day practical exam starting tomorrow. Good luck."

With that, she strode out, the papers trailing obediently behind her.

As soon as she was gone, the room erupted into movement. Students groaned, stretched, and staggered out of their seats like survivors of a harrowing ordeal.

"I'm doomed," one student muttered, near tears. "I don't think I got anything right."

"Same," another moaned, dragging their feet toward the door. "Expulsion's looking real good right now."

Charlotte rose from her seat dramatically, her curls bouncing as she clung to Ariana's arm. "It's over," she wailed in mock despair. "No more mental abuse! I can't take it anymore."

"There, there," Ariana said soothingly, patting Charlotte's head like a comforting older sister. "I'm sure you did great. You'll see."

"Blondie!" Asher called out as he approached Dylan's desk, where the blond was still sound asleep. He gave him a light shake, but Dylan didn't stir.

"Blondie," Asher repeated, louder this time. Still no response.

With a twitching eye and a growing smirk, Asher raised his hand and delivered a sharp smack to the back of Dylan's head.

"Ow!" Dylan yelped, bolting upright and clutching his head. He blinked groggily, glaring at Asher. "Which foul beast dares disturb my holy slumber?"

"The exam's over, you idiot," Asher shot back, rolling his eyes. "You planning to nap here all day, or what?"

Dylan stretched lazily, yawning as he stood. "Finally. I can escape this den of mental torture." He grabbed his belongings and headed for the door without a backward glance.

Asher, still amused, turned to spot Liam at the far end of the room. For once, the usually stoic fighter wore an expression that could only be described as sheer disorientation. His red eyes were slightly glazed, his shoulders slumped like he'd just fought a dozen battles back-to-back.

"Even the wannabe had a hard time," Asher muttered with a grin, barely holding back laughter. "This is priceless."

"HEY!" Dylan's voice rang out from the doorway, drawing everyone's attention. He stood there, leaning casually against the frame, his expression one of exaggerated disgust. "Are you guys planning to spend the rest of your day in this dungeon? I, for one, am reclaiming my freedom."