

ShadowBound 197

Chapter 197: New Courses Begin

As the week passed, students finalized their course selections and received their schedules. Within Liam and Ariana's group, Sheila and Charlotte also confirmed their choices. By the end of the process, several of them found themselves sharing classes.

Liam and Asher ended up in both Fire Magic and Knight Combat Training together. Ariana and Dylan shared Alchemy. Sheila and Asher were in Strategic Command and Leadership, while Max and Dylan took Forgemastery. Charlotte and Sheila both had Knight Combat Training.

Most of them were glad they'd run into each other throughout the day, but one particular pairing raised some eyebrows—especially Dylan's.

Charlotte had chosen Tactical Espionage and Diplomacy. And somehow, she had ended up in the same class as Liam.

Which led to this moment—Dylan standing in front of Charlotte with an expression of sheer, exaggerated suspicion. His green eyes narrowed, his lips pursed, and his arms crossed.

"Alright, spill it," Dylan demanded, dramatically pointing a finger at her. "Why the hell did you, of all people, pick Tactical Espionage and Diplomacy? Do you even know what espionage means?"

Charlotte, who was lazily lounging on a bench with one leg draped over the other, stretched her arms with an amused smirk. "Mmm... espionage. Sounds exotic, doesn't it?" she purred, tilting her head as her curly hair bounced slightly.

Dylan groaned, rubbing his temples. "You're not answering the question. And don't think I don't see what's going on here. You just wanted to invade Liam's space even more, didn't you?"

Charlotte's smirk widened, and she let out a soft chuckle. "Maybe..." She leaned forward, resting her chin on her palm. "That's half of it."

Dylan gasped dramatically, clutching his chest. "She admits it! I knew it! You're obsessed!"

Charlotte let out a purring laugh. "Can you blame me? He's just so... interesting." Her glowing dark blue eyes gleamed mischievously. "Besides, the course does suit me. Stealth, infiltration, deception—" she tapped a clawed finger against her lips "—seems like a purrfect fit for someone like me, don't you think?"

Dylan gave her a deadpan stare. "Did you just say 'purrfect' unironically?"

Charlotte winked.

Dylan sighed and shook his head. "You're insufferable." Then he muttered under his breath, "Liam's so doomed."

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As the week ended and a new one began, the real training at Dark Knight Academy was finally underway. The academy buzzed with activity as students hurried through the capstone pathways, weaving through the hallways in search of their assigned classrooms. Some carried books, others chatted excitedly about their upcoming courses, while a few looked utterly lost.

Among them were Liam and Asher, walking side by side, both heading to the same class.

"You sure you know where this class is?" Asher asked, glancing at the room numbers as they passed by. His blue eyes flickered with mild impatience.

"Since this is the Myst Mastery department, it should be down this hallway," Liam replied calmly, unfazed.

Asher scoffed, shaking his head with a smug grin. "You sound real confident for someone who's about to get completely outclassed. I mean, let's be real, Liam—I've got blue flames. This course is gonna be a breeze for me. Meanwhile, you? Basic fire magic, some shady dark stuff—might wanna take notes from me when I leave you in the dust."

Liam didn't even spare him a glance. He just kept walking, his expression blank, as if Asher's words were no more than background noise.

Asher paused mid-step, blinking. "Hey. Hey, are you even listening?"

Silence.

"Oh, I see how it is," Asher muttered, crossing his arms. "You just tune me out like I'm some annoying breeze, huh? That's real mature."

More silence.

"You—Liam, if you don't answer me right now, I swear I'm gonna—"

Liam stopped walking, turning his head slightly. "You're still talking?"

Asher clenched his fists. "I swear to the Stars, I will set your uniform on fire—"

Before he could finish, they both caught sight of a classroom door at the end of the hallway, a metal plate mounted above it reading:

Professor Orin Vale – Elemental Myst Mastery

"Looks like we found it," Liam said flatly.

Asher clicked his tongue. "Tch. Lucky for you, otherwise I would've—"

Liam was already walking inside.

"...You know what? Never mind," Asher grumbled, following after him.

As they entered, the first thing they noticed was the sheer size of the room. It wasn't a standard classroom—it was a full-fledged lecture hall designed to accommodate at least a hundred students. The seats were arranged in ascending rows, forming a semi-circle around a raised platform where a massive arcane diagram was inscribed onto the floor. The walls were lined with myst-powered torches that burned in various elemental colors, shifting hues depending on the ambient myst levels.

A large blackboard spanned the front wall, already filled with some kind written equations and what looked like elemental resonance theories. They might likely have been written by Professor Vale in advance.

However, none of that was what caught their attention.

It was the students' reactions.

The moment Liam and Asher stepped inside, the atmosphere changed. Conversations halted. Some students looked their way and instantly frowned—expressions shifting from casual to disgusted or annoyed. A few exchanged whispers, while others barely acknowledged their presence.

Asher, naturally, noticed. He leaned over to Liam. "Huh. Either we just walked into the wrong classroom, or everyone here suddenly decided they hate us."

Liam, as usual, remained unbothered. "It's because we ranked up."

"Yeah, but like—this level of saltiness? Damn. You'd think we stole their lunch money."

It wasn't surprising, though. Liam had just jumped to 4th place and Asher to 5th in the rankings. For students already established in fire magic without having competition, two bastards who were already in the top ten now climbing so high to top five so quickly, there was bound to cause resentment if they ended in the same class with them.

But neither of them cared.

Without acknowledging the stares, they made their way to the third row and took their seats.

Asher leaned back, smirking. "Guess we'll just have to remind them why we're here, huh?"

Liam simply nodded, eyes forward. "Let them think what they want."

And with that, they waited for class to begin.

As the students settled into their seats, the academy bell rang, signaling the official start of class. The sound echoed through the lecture hall, and within moments, the door swung open.

A man stepped inside with a composed stride, dressed in a well-tailored navy coat over a high-collared shirt. His transparent glasses rested on the bridge of his nose, giving him an air of wisdom. Despite his dark gray hair revealing his age, his sharp sky-blue eyes and youthful demeanor made him look no older than his mid-forties. There was a quiet authority in his presence—not overbearing, yet impossible to ignore.

He walked to the front of the room and turned to face them, offering a polite yet firm nod.

"Good morning, students," he greeted, his voice smooth and measured. "My name is Professor Orin Vale, and I will be your instructor for Elemental Myst Mastery – Fire Specialization."

His gaze swept across the room, taking in the nineteen students before him. After a brief pause, he sighed softly, almost as if he were reflecting on something.

"Only nineteen this year... It seems the number of fire magic users continues to dwindle."

His words were not filled with disappointment, merely observation. A few students exchanged glances, unsure how to react.

Then, with a slight tilt of his head, Professor Vale suddenly posed a question:

"What is fire?"

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Silence fell over the room.

It was such a simple question—almost too simple. And yet, the more they thought about it, the less obvious the answer became.

One student cautiously raised a hand. "Fire is... an element used for destruction and creation?"

Professor Vale gave a thoughtful nod. "A reasonable answer, but not quite complete."

Another student hesitated before answering. "Fire is... energy released through combustion?"

"A scientific approach. Yet, still lacking something fundamental."

The room grew tense. Some students shifted uncomfortably, while others remained deep in thought. Even Asher, usually quick with confidence, narrowed his eyes in concentration.

Liam, on the other hand, remained silent, simply watching.

After a few moments, Professor Vale adjusted his glasses and answered his own question.

"Fire... is the expression of will."

His words were calm, yet they carried weight.

"It is hunger that demands fuel, force that demands movement, and resolve that refuses to be extinguished. Fire is not merely an element, nor just a force of destruction—it is a manifestation of intent. The stronger the will, the hotter the flame. This is why fire myst is deeply tied to emotion, focus, and purpose."

The room remained still as his words settled in.

"Over the next three months, we will delve into the depths of fire myst. Not just how to wield it, but how to understand it. You will learn to control its nature, enhance its potency, and refine it beyond mere combustion. Some of you may struggle, others may excel—but none of you will remain the same."

His eyes briefly locked onto Liam and Asher, as if acknowledging something in them.

"Expect challenges—both theoretical and practical. Expect to be pushed beyond your comfort zones. And above all..." He adjusted his glasses once more, his calm presence shifting slightly—becoming just a bit sharper, more intense.

"Expect to earn your place in this class."

His words hung in the air for a moment before he finally leaned back slightly, his expression easing once more.

"If that is understood, then shall we begin?"