

ShadowBound 199

Chapter 199: Knight Combat Training

The academy bell rang once more, signaling the end of the students' first course classes. The once-quiet hallways buzzed with activity as students rushed to their next sessions, eager to make it within the five-minute transition period.

Liam and Asher stepped out of their classroom, heading in the same direction—they both had Knight Combat Training next, under the same set of instructors. As they made their way toward the training halls, they recalled the slight change in location from their usual training grounds. The instructors had informed them that while the past months' sessions were merely introductory, they were now entering the academy's real training system. The training halls were designed for structured, real-time combat experience, unlike the outdoor grounds meant for basic assessments.

Fortunately, they found the correct hall without much trouble. However, the moment they stepped inside, it became clear—they were late.

The other eighteen students were already assembled before a mounted platform, where three knights stood, their presence commanding immediate attention.

"I think we're late," Asher whispered.

"Yeah," Liam responded simply.

The moment they entered, all eyes landed on them.

"Ah, finally, the fourth and fifth have decided to show up," one of the knights remarked, his voice carrying a sharp edge of authority. "You've got thirty seconds to change. Academy uniforms are not permitted in this hall."

Without hesitation, Liam and Asher instinctively located the changing room, swiftly swapping into their training gear. In less than thirty seconds, they returned, standing at attention.

The knight smirked. "Well, at least you two can follow orders. Now, drop and give me one hundred push-ups."

Asher muttered under his breath, "Is that supposed to be a punishment?" but complied nonetheless, lowering himself to the ground. Liam followed suit without complaint.

Just as they descended for their first push-up, the knight's voice rang out again. "Hold it. Don't even think about moving."

He stepped down from the platform, his heavy boots echoing across the hall as he approached them. Without a word, he grabbed four large weights.

Then, without warning, he dropped two on each of their backs.

The sudden weight nearly made them buckle—clearly, these weren't light.

"Those are one hundred pounds each," the knight said, his tone unwavering. "You are to complete one hundred push-ups."

He let the statement hang for a moment before adding, "Within three minutes."

The knight crossed his arms, staring down at Liam and Asher with an unimpressed look.

"You're free to use myst," he said flatly. "Enhance your strength, boost your endurance—hell, use whatever useless tricks you want. But if you do, you'd better finish this punishment, no excuses."

Liam and Asher didn't need to be told twice. Without hesitation, they instinctively channeled their myst, reinforcing their bodies against the crushing weight pressing down on them. Asher's blue flames flickered faintly around him, amplifying his muscle strength while keeping his breathing steady. Liam, however, took it a step further—he activated Crimson Breathing, his myst circulation intensifying, spreading warmth through his limbs, his body adapting to the extreme strain. His breath grew sharper, more controlled, his muscles tightening as power coursed through him.

The first few sets were almost effortless. The two powered through, reaching forty push-ups with little sign of struggle.

But then, the weight truly set in.

Despite their reinforced bodies, the sheer load bore down on them relentlessly. Their arms trembled slightly as the repetitive movement began to burn—the heat from Asher's flames made it worse, and even Liam, despite Crimson Breathing, could feel the growing exhaustion creeping in. Their muscles screamed for relief, but they pushed forward, refusing to break under pressure.

All the while, the other students watched with mixed reactions.

"They deserve it. Ranking up to fourth and fifth doesn't put them on top of the world."

"They should've known better than to be late on the first day."

"Serves them right."

Some students smirked at their suffering, enjoying the display. Others looked at them with mild sympathy—but none spoke up to help.

Liam and Asher, however, didn't care. Push-up after push-up, they kept moving.

They reached eighty-six and eighty-three, sweat dripping from their faces, arms shaking, and fifty seconds left on the clock.

But before they could push into the final stretch, a second knight finally spoke up.

"Enough," he said, his deep voice cutting through the murmurs. "You've done a sufficient warm-up. I wouldn't want you drained before the assessment begins."

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With that, the punishment was over.

Liam and Asher shook off the heavy weights from their backs, and took a brief moment to roll their shoulders before stepping away. Neither of them showed any sign of their fatigue—no hunched backs, no heavy breathing—just sharp, unwavering expressions as they moved to join the group.

The knight who had delivered their punishment walked back to the mounted platform where the other two instructors stood, then gestured toward them.

"Join the rest."

They obeyed, taking their spots among the students. Around them, some smirked, others sneered, and a few looked away, clearly uncomfortable.

Once everyone was settled, the first knight stepped forward. His piercing gaze scanned over the class with cold disapproval before he finally spoke, his voice sharp as steel.

"Instructor Darius Flint." His tone was brutally direct, no sugar-coating. "Your combat instructor. I don't deal in pleasantries. You do what I say, or you'll wish you had."

The second knight gave a small nod, his voice gruffer, seasoned with age. "Instructor Garrick Stroud." His weathered face and numerous battle scars spoke for themselves. "If you think you know how to fight, I'll show you just how wrong you are."

The third knight, much quieter, simply nodded, his silver eyes calculating and reserved. "Vance Holloway. Defense and countermeasures." No further explanation, just that.

Once introductions were over, Darius stepped forward again, hands behind his back. His sharp gaze flicked over the students, then back to Liam and Asher.

"Now," he said, his tone clipped, "what did you all learn from what you just witnessed?"

A few students hesitated before speaking up.

"That Liam and Asher shouldn't let their small achievement get to their heads."

"They ranked up, but that doesn't mean they're untouchable."

"Maybe they'll learn not to be late next time."

A few others muttered similar sentiments, some smug, some just parroting what they thought the instructors wanted to hear.

Darius let the idiocy continue for a few more seconds before finally snapping.

"Shut it."

The room fell silent immediately.

His eyes burned with pure disappointment as he slowly scanned the class, shaking his head.

"And you wonder why most of you are ranked at the bottom," he said, voice dripping with disgust. "Your pathetic excuses for answers just confirmed something I already knew—most of you don't think. You react. You assume. And worst of all, you justify your own mediocrity by dragging others down."

Some students shifted uncomfortably, others clenched their fists, but no one dared to speak.

"You sit here, looking down on them as if they did something wrong. But let me ask you this—how many of you could do what they just did? How many of you could handle 200 pounds on your backs and still push through without hesitation?"

He let that sink in for a second before delivering the final blow.

"None of you."

A few students flinched.

"Most of you wouldn't even get past twenty before your arms gave out and you started crying about how 'unfair' it is. But these two?" He gestured toward Liam and Asher. "They didn't hesitate. They adapted. They handled the punishment like soldiers, not sniveling children."

Darius leaned forward slightly, his sharp gaze cutting into them.

"And that, you miserable lot, is why you are ranked below them."

The air felt heavy, the weight of his words pressing down on the students far worse than any physical training.

Satisfied that his point had been hammered in, Darius finally took a step back.

"I'll leave you with that piece of common sense," he muttered. "You clearly needed it."

Then, without another word, he turned to Garrick, handing over the lesson.

The battle-scarred veteran cracked his neck, stepping forward with a smirk.

"Alright," Garrick said, his voice rough but amused. "Now that Darius has bruised your egos, let's see if your bodies are any tougher."