

ShadowBound 200

Chapter 200: Knight Combat Training: Assessment Test

Garrick cracked his knuckles, exhaling sharply as he glanced at the large clock mounted on the far side of the training hall.

"We've already wasted a good five minutes," he stated, his gruff voice carrying through the hall. "That leaves me with just twenty minutes to explain things. After that, we've got an hour and fifty-five minutes to assess whether you lot are worth anything on your own."

His gaze swept over the students.

"Listen up—this assessment is purely based on solo efforts. No teams, no partners. If you were hoping to rely on a friend to carry your weight, forget it. We already saw how most of you fumbled during the Battlefield Exam."

A few students tensed, some shifting uncomfortably at the reminder of their less-than-stellar performances in team-based combat.

"We're not interested in seeing how hopeless some of you are in groups," he continued bluntly. "This is about how well you can stand alone."

His words settled over the class like a heavy weight, making it clear that today wasn't gonna be just another routine lesson like the past.

He gestured around the vast training hall, his expression unreadable.

"Now, let me explain how this will work. This hall—along with every other training hall—is infused with myst. It allows us to create holographic images of demons, ranging from Feral-class to Advanced Horrors. These holograms will be your opponents from now on."

Some students murmured in interest, while others looked skeptical.

Garrick smirked, as if already predicting their thoughts.

"Don't get comfortable. These may look like holograms, but they are very real. They will fight, they will strike, and they will hurt you."

The murmuring ceased instantly.

"The only thing separating you from actual death is your training attire."

A few students glanced down at their combat uniforms, some still adjusting to the fit.

"These attires are designed to link with the myst system, translating every hit you take into real pain. Without them, the attacks wouldn't feel real—but since you're all wearing them, trust me, you'll know when you've been hit."

A few nervous glances were exchanged, but Garrick ignored them.

"Now, onto the main challenge."

He raised a hand, and suddenly, the walls of the training hall began shifting, morphing as towering structures of black stone rose from the ground, stretching high into the air. Passageways twisted and turned, forming an elaborate labyrinth in mere seconds.

"For this assessment, this entire place is being transformed into a maze with high walls. These walls, just like the demons, are holographic—but they're real enough to trap you inside."

Some students stiffened, realizing that this wasn't going to be a simple sparring session.

"Each of you will be dropped at a different starting point within the maze. Your goal? Survive. Hunt demons, or get hunted by them."

Garrick's smirk returned, but there was nothing friendly about it.

"What we're assessing is simple." He raised a finger. "First, your ability to handle close-range combat with Horror-class demons. A lot of you think you can fight, but you crumble the moment something faster, smarter, and stronger than you comes at you with real intent."

A second finger. "Next, your defensive adaptability. We've seen enough of you going all out on the offense, acting like wild animals with no sense of self-preservation. That's what gets people killed."

A third finger. "And finally—your awareness. If you're too stupid to notice what's happening around you, then you're too stupid to live."

Silence. Heavy. Unsettling.

"You have five minutes."

With that, the platform beneath Garrick, Darius, and Vance slowly began to descend, lowering them back to the ground before they turned and walked away.

"Class time left: 1 hour and 55 minutes." Garrick's voice echoed as they left.

"The assessment begins in five. Get your weapons and prepare."

The moment the instructors disappeared, the tension in the room shifted. The students, now left to themselves, broke into action.

Some immediately rushed to the weapon racks stationed along the edges of the hall, while others stood frozen for a moment, the reality of the assessment sinking in.

Liam and Asher, however, didn't hesitate. They moved swiftly toward the nearest rack.

"So, solo combat against illusions of demons," Asher muttered, scanning the weapons. "That actually sounds fun."

Liam didn't respond. He simply reached forward, his eyes scanning the selection before gripping a sleek, black-bladed sword. He tested its balance with a subtle swing, the weight familiar yet different from his grandpa's sword.

Asher grabbed a long, curved blade, testing its weight before letting out a satisfied grunt.

"We've fought real demons before," he continued, his sharp blue eyes glinting. "This should be nothing, right?"

Liam glanced at him briefly before returning his focus to adjusting his grip. "They said the damage is real enough. We'll see."

Nearby, the other students were murmuring among themselves, some throwing glances at Liam and Asher.

"Tch. Acting like they're above the rest of us."

"Ranking up to fourth and fifth doesn't mean they own the damn academy."

"Maybe they should've been paired against real demons instead—see if they still keep that attitude."

Liam ignored the whispers. They were expected. The battlefield exam had made him and Asher stand out, and some people clearly weren't thrilled about it.

Asher, however, smirked as he strapped on his gauntlets. "Man, I love the jealousy. Makes things more interesting."

Just as the five-minute mark approached, a loud mechanical hum echoed throughout the hall.

The maze began shifting again, its walls twisting and reforming, creating a new structure that no one had memorized yet.

A sharp beep sounded.

Then, Garrick's voice rang out:

"Assessment begins now."

Suddenly, the floor beneath each student vanished.

Liam's body plummeted downward, gravity pulling him into darkness. The sensation lasted barely a second before he landed firmly on solid ground.

A flicker of blue flames to his left confirmed Asher had landed nearby.

As the assessment began, Garrick's voice echoed through the labyrinth:

"You have exactly one hour and thirty minutes. Make every second count—or don't. Either way, we'll see what you're worth."

The announcement barely faded before the maze came alive.

All across the shifting corridors, holographic demons began materializing—feral-class beasts snarling and lunging, while horror-class figures twisted and crawled, their grotesque forms moving with eerie intelligence.

Some of the students were already struggling. One boy, armed with a spear, barely managed to deflect the swipe of a massive wolf-like feral demon before stumbling back in terror.

Another girl attempted to cast a spell but panicked when a horror-class demon dashed at her, claws swinging wildly. She screamed, narrowly dodging before scrambling away.

However, some fought with effort. A tall student wielding a war axe braced himself, managing to take down a feral-class beast with a powerful swing. Another, using twin short swords, displayed agility, striking fast before evading the retaliating blows.

But there was a clear difference between them— and Liam and Asher.

Deep in the maze, Liam gripped his black-bladed sword, its weight still unfamiliar in his hand. He sliced through a lunging horror-class demon, his movements precise but not quite as smooth as when using his grandfather's sword.

"This isn't the same."

With the training he has been doing with his grandfather's sword, he quickly got used to its weight and balance. The sword was so perfect that it felt like an extension of his body. However, the one he wielded now lacked that same refinement. It was slightly off, just enough to be noticeable.

Another horror-class demon lunged. Discover hidden content at

With a controlled breath, Crimson Breathing activated.

Heat surged through his veins, his muscles responding with enhanced precision. He sidestepped, bringing the sword down in a swift arc— severing the demon's head cleanly.

Still, something felt off. His grandfather's blade moved with him; this one needed adjustment. He gritted his teeth and kept moving.

"But what can I do? I'll make it work."

Nearby, Asher was having fun.

His curved blade ignited with blue flames as he cut through a feral-class demon, then swiftly ducked under a second demon's swipe, countering with a fiery upward slash.

"These illusions feel way too real," he muttered, feeling the shockwave from an attack barely miss him. He grinned, tightening his grip. "I like it."

Unlike many of their classmates, neither Liam nor Asher hesitated when engaging an enemy. There was no fear, no moment of doubt—only movement and execution.

As the clock continued ticking, the two of them kept cutting through the illusions, their performance standing far above the rest.

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From their observation platform, Garrick, Darius, and Vance watched the students through floating projection screens, each displaying different sections of the maze.

Darius let out a disappointed sigh, shaking his head. "Pathetic. Half of them are flinching before even throwing a proper attack."

Vance, as usual, said nothing, but his sharp gaze analyzed every student's movements.

Garrick, arms crossed, grunted. "Some of them are at least trying. But most? Useless."

Darius smirked, eyes locking onto Liam and Asher's screens.

"Those two, though... completely different from the rest. No hesitation, no wasted movement. They spot a demon and kill it—simple as that."

Vance finally spoke, his voice quiet but firm. "Guess that's why Galen took an interest in them the moment they enrolled."

Garrick clicked his tongue. "Hmph. That bastard does have an eye for talent."

He leaned forward slightly, watching as Liam adjusted his sword mid-fight, adapting to its weight in real time. Asher, meanwhile, burned through enemies with ruthless efficiency.

"Tch. Guess I'll have to make sure they don't get too comfortable. Once things really start..." he cracked his knuckles, a cruel grin forming. "I'm not giving those two a break."