

ShadowBound 21

Chapter 21: Crimson Breathing

Liam had returned home from school, as usual, went through his rigorous training routine, and then joined the Silverhart family for dinner later that evening.

He exchanged polite farewells as they all retired to their respective rooms, but unlike the others, Liam had something else in mind for the night.

Long after the house had grown silent, with darkness enveloping every corner, Liam retrieved the old book he had borrowed from the library — *Crimson Breathing*. Gripping it tightly, he slipped out of his room, careful not to make a sound.

Moving with the stealth and precision he'd gained from years of combat training, Liam made his way down the hallway, eventually reaching the staircase that led to the training room below.

He descended step by step, each footfall barely a whisper against the stone, until he stood before the training room door. He eased it open, the hinges creaking softly, and stepped inside, gently closing the door behind him.

One thing always stood out about this room—the light. Despite there being no visible lamps or torches, the entire space seemed to glow with a soft, ambient luminescence, casting faint shadows across the walls.

It was as if the room itself radiated energy, a perfect place for someone like Liam who sought to push beyond his limits.

With no chairs or benches, Liam settled on the cool, smooth floor, leaning his back against the wall. Taking a deep breath, he opened *Crimson Breathing* and allowed himself to delve into its contents.

The first thing that struck him was a revelation in the introductory lines — this was no ordinary manual. It was written by someone who had lived during the Demon War, an era of unparalleled strife and bloodshed, when mages and knights alike fought for survival. The author's name caught his eye: Liora Tavern.

'For something this old, it's surprisingly intact,' Liam mused as he ran his fingers over the slightly frayed edges of the pages. It was clear that the book had been long forgotten, neglected among the vast collection of the library.

It made him wonder just how many secrets were tucked away within its aging pages, secrets that could change the course of his journey.

He began to read, absorbing Liora's words:

"To anyone who finds this, I am Liora Tavern, and I pen these words in the midst of the Demon War. We've been fighting for years, each day blending into the next, and if there's one thing this war has taught us, it's that endurance is everything. We mages and knights were forced to adapt, to discover new ways to survive in battles that stretched on for hours, even days. We needed a way to keep our strength from fading."

Liam's eyes narrowed, the mention of the Demon War capturing his full attention. The weight of history pressed against him, and he could almost feel the chaos and turmoil of that ancient conflict, as if Liora's words were transporting him back in time.

'Liora Tavern was a mage, then,' Liam thought, a flicker of concern crossing his mind. 'I hope this isn't something that only favors those with magical abilities.'

He continued reading:

"Our greatest challenge was to develop techniques that would allow us to endure longer in battle. But every method we tried seemed to cater only to one group—either the mages or the knights. It was frustrating, seeing half of our warriors benefit while the others struggled, knowing that the technique could mean the difference between life and death. As time passed, and as countless lives were lost, I knew we needed something that would unite us all, something that any warrior could use, regardless of their discipline. And so, after countless trials and endless nights of experimentation, I succeeded in creating what I believe to be the ultimate technique: Crimson Breathing."

Liam felt a spark of excitement, his heart quickening as he read the words. "The ultimate technique for both mages and knights..." he repeated under his breath.

'If this really works,' he thought, gripping the edges of the book a little tighter, 'it might be exactly what I need.'

Yet, one line stood out to him, and he couldn't ignore it:

"This technique, while powerful, is not without its limitations. It offers only a temporary surge, a fleeting moment of strength."

'Temporary...' Liam's excitement dimmed, but only slightly. 'Still, if it can give me even a fraction of an advantage, it's worth it. There's always room to adapt and improve. And who knows? Maybe I can push it beyond what Liora herself imagined.'

Liam eagerly turned the page, his eyes scanning Liora's detailed explanation of Crimson Breathing. Her words carried a tone of urgency, as if she knew this technique could mean life or death for its wielder.

"Crimson Breathing is a method designed to amplify the endurance and stamina of any warrior who wields it, be they mage or knight," Liora wrote. "By controlling one's breathing patterns, it's possible to channel myst more efficiently through the body, allowing a practitioner to fight longer and with greater strength. This technique draws power from the very essence of life — the breath itself — and uses it to fan the flames of your inner strength. However, it's not without risks. What you gain in power, you may lose in control, and if you're not careful, this technique could burn you from within."

Liam's breath caught as he read the next part, his pulse quickening with each word.

"Crimson Breathing consists of three distinct stages," Liora explained. "Each stage is designed to push the user to new heights, but it comes with its own challenges and dangers. Mastering each stage is essential, as rushing forward without proper understanding could lead to catastrophic consequences."

The first stage: Ignition Phase.

"In the Ignition Phase, the user begins by regulating their breathing into a steady rhythm, inhaling deeply and exhaling slowly. This process draws myst into the lungs, infusing it with oxygen, and sends it coursing through the bloodstream. As this continues, you'll feel a warmth spreading through your chest, as if a fire has been kindled within you. This warmth represents the activation of Crimson Breathing. At

this stage, your stamina and endurance will begin to increase, allowing you to maintain physical activity for longer periods without fatigue."

Liam could almost feel the warmth Liora described, as if the words themselves were sparking something deep within him. This stage seemed simple enough, but he knew better than to underestimate it.

"However," Liora continued, "if you push too hard or fail to maintain the rhythm of your breathing, the warmth can become overwhelming, leading to dizziness, lightheadedness, and even temporary paralysis. This stage may seem basic, but it requires a great deal of focus and discipline to master."

The second stage: Furnace State.

"Once you've mastered the Ignition Phase, you can begin to push yourself into the Furnace State. At this point, your breathing will become faster, more intense, and the warmth within you will transform into a burning heat. This heat signifies that your myst is actively circulating throughout your entire body, greatly enhancing your strength, speed, and stamina. You'll find that you can perform techniques with far greater efficiency, and your physical capabilities will feel amplified. However, this power comes at a price."

Liora's warning was clear in her words:

"The Furnace State can be incredibly draining, both physically and mentally. If you linger in this stage for too long, you'll start to feel your muscles burn, your heart will pound against your chest, and your body will begin to overheat. It's crucial to manage this stage carefully, balancing the power it grants with the toll it takes on your body. Overexertion can lead to muscle fatigue, dehydration, and even unconsciousness."

Liam could almost hear Liora's voice in his head, urging him to be cautious. He knew that the key to mastering the Furnace State would be maintaining control over that heat, walking the fine line between power and exhaustion.

The third and final stage: Flare Burst.

"The Flare Burst is the most dangerous and demanding stage of Crimson Breathing," Liora warned. "At this point, your breathing will become rapid and fierce, as if you're trying to stoke a raging inferno within you. Your myst will surge, flooding every fiber of your being with raw energy. In this state, your power and endurance will reach their absolute peak, allowing you to push beyond your natural limits for a brief period."

However, the drawbacks of this stage were severe.

"The Flare Burst is not meant to be sustained. If you remain in this state for more than a few minutes, your body will begin to break down. Your muscles will tear, your blood vessels could rupture, and your myst reserves will be drained at an alarming rate. It's a last resort, a desperate bid for victory when all else has failed. Use it sparingly, or you risk destroying yourself from the inside out."

Liam's eyes narrowed as he absorbed this information. The Flare Burst sounded like an ultimate gamble — a technique that could tip the scales in his favor but would exact a heavy price if used recklessly. He couldn't help but admire Liora's determination to create something so powerful yet so dangerous.

The final note from Liora brought everything into perspective:

"Crimson Breathing is not a technique to be taken lightly. It requires unwavering focus, immense discipline, and a strong will to endure the pain it brings. But if mastered, it will grant you strength beyond measure, allowing you to face even the fiercest of enemies without faltering. Remember, your breath is the key to unlocking your true potential. Control it, harness it, and let it guide you to victory."

Liam closed the book, his heart still racing. He could feel the excitement bubbling within him, a hunger for power that only grew stronger with every passing moment. This was exactly what he had been searching for—a path to push beyond his limits, to become more than he ever thought possible.

"Crimson Breathing," he muttered to himself, gripping the book tightly. "I'll master it... no matter what it takes."

The fleeting effects of Crimson Breathing didn't discourage Liam in the slightest; if anything, they fueled his resolve to master it. He closed the book with a sense of purpose, but as he did, something caught his eye — a page that remained entirely blank.

"What's this?" he muttered, brow furrowing. "There's nothing here."

Curiosity gnawed at him, and he couldn't shake the familiarity of the sight. It reminded him of long evenings back in Benbrok, sitting by the hearth as his grandfather scribbled letters on parchment.

The old man would often seal those letters, yet when Liam tried to peek, the pages appeared blank. He once asked, exasperated, how anyone could read invisible writing.

His grandfather, with that mischievous twinkle in his eye, revealed the secret: words hidden beneath the surface, waiting to be brought to light.

Recalling the memory, Liam's lips curved into a small, knowing smile. He snapped his fingers, summoning a faint ember to dance on his fingertip.

Carefully, he placed the flame just behind the blank page, and as if coaxed by an ancient spell, ink began to seep into view, forming lines of text that pulsed with a subtle, crimson glow.

"There it is," he whispered, his grin widening into something sharper, something darker. A glint of satisfaction flashed in his eyes, giving him an almost menacing aura.

"I knew there was no way you'll only rely on something temporary," he murmured to the hidden author of the text. "You couldn't have won a battle with something that only lasts for a moment."

Liam looked at the hidden words with completely intrigue.