

ShadowBound 225

Chapter 225: Announcement

Restore scroll position 90%

Liam stood still, absorbing the information that had just been dumped on him. And all he could think was—this damn universe had it out for him. Somehow, it always made sure he learned the most basic things way later than he should.

If Mystica hadn't just explained Mystical Levels, Ascension, and all that crucial stuff, he probably would've kept pushing forward blindly—wasting his time, trying to break through when he'd already hit the apex of his current level.

After a long silence, the first question that left his mouth was, "How do you even know what level you're at?"

Mystica stretched lazily, then answered, "Hm, there are a few ways, but I'll only bother mentioning the one that's useful to me. It's called Mystsense. Some people call it Myst Perception, but I prefer Mystsense—it sounds cooler."

She twirled a strand of her dark hair between her fingers as she continued. "Not everyone can use it, especially those with low Myst sensitivity. With Mystsense, you can see a person's Myst flow, and if you master it well enough, you can even see their core. It can be used internally to gauge your own level or externally to assess someone else's."

Liam nodded. "I see... so you can use Mystsense?"

Mystica smirked, placing a hand on her hip. "Of course, sweetie. What do you take this elegant beauty for?"

"Just making sure. So... care to tell me what level I'm at?"

Mystica let out an exaggerated groan. "Ugh, I cannot believe I brought you here to help me, yet somehow, I'm the one doing all the work. But fine." She mock-whined before activating Mystsense.

Her eyes glowed faintly as she focused on Liam's chest, peering into his Myst Core. Just like the other times she had checked without his permission, his core still shimmered in violet—5-star, Low-tier.

"You're at 5-star Low-tier." Mystica declared, then immediately waved him off. "And you know what? I'm done with you. Since you're no use to me right now, go bother my little star—your lovely girlfriend, Ariana—for help. And listen, don't be a jerk to her, or you'll definitely reap the consequences."

She leaned back into her seat, already dismissing him.

Liam sighed. "Thanks. But Ariana isn't my girlfriend. Also, you forgot about the main reason I came here."

Mystica cracked an eye open. "Oh? Then go ahead, shoot."

"I wanted to ask if my dark magic will need to be sealed again for the upcoming exam, like last time."

Mystica scoffed. "Sealed? And for what? Hasn't Seraphina been drilling Myst suppression into you? Just use that to suppress your dark presence, sweetie. Going through that whole concealment process again? Not a priority right now."

Liam considered it for a moment before nodding. "I guess that works. Anyway, thanks—and sorry I couldn't be of any help."

He turned toward the door.

Mystica waved him off lazily. "Yep, you're welcome, sweetie."

As Liam stepped out, Mystica let out a soft chuckle, a smirk playing on her lips.

'Huh. He actually apologized for not being useful.'

She leaned back, amused.

'Seems like my little shadow is changing... and growing.'

That night, back in his dorm, Liam finally had time to process everything he had learned from Mystica. After some thought, he decided to wait until after the exams to talk to Ariana about it. This wasn't the time to burden someone else with his problems.

For the rest of the weekend, Liam and the others continued their rotational sparring matches. The training helped in many ways, but once the new week began, they switched things up. Instead of sparring, they requested permission from one of the Knight Combat instructors to access the academy's holographic system, allowing them to run teamwork-based combat scenarios.

Permission was granted, but with a strict one-hour time limit. The group had no issue complying—though Asher and Dylan, predictably, tried pushing for overtime whenever they could. Sheila, as the team's unofficial leader, had to keep them in check, which was a pain—especially when it came to Asher.

Now, three days into the week, classes had just ended. But instead of heading to their dorms, the cafeteria, or anywhere else, the students all made their way to Beacon Hall, summoned by the Headmaster himself.

The students filed into the hall, quickly finding their seats as the atmosphere buzzed with anticipation. As everyone settled, the Headmaster, Thion, and his assistant, Gordon, took their positions on the platform.

The chatter gradually faded as the Headmaster stood before the pulpit.

"Good evening, students. It's been a while since we've gathered like this," Thion began with a steady voice.

"Now, I'm sure you all know the reason for this assembly today. As your instructors have already informed you, I'm here to explain what your final exam for this semester will entail." He paused, letting that sink in.

"Before I get into the details, though, let me ask: How's everyone adjusting to the holographic features in the training halls? I'd say they're quite realistic, wouldn't you agree?" Thion added with a small grin.

A murmur of agreement rippled through the room as students nodded, though a few rolled their eyes in mild annoyance at the holographic setup.

"Seems like you're all on the same page," Thion said, his smile widening slightly. "That's good, because your final exam is going to be based on just that."

At those words, a wave of relief washed over the students. Most of them had grown accustomed to battling holographic demons during their lessons. Despite how real it felt, whether getting injured or attacked, they'd become experts at handling it. Now, hearing that the exam would be based on it, many were thinking, 'Easy pass.'

Thion's gaze swept across the room, catching the students' expressions before he let out a small, knowing smirk. "I see you're all pleased that the exam will be something you're familiar with. But I highly doubt anyone will be smiling once you hear the full details."

The room fell silent in an instant.

"Quick question," Thion continued, his voice taking on a more serious tone. "How much do you really know about war with demons?"

As he spoke, a magical diagram appeared in the air behind him, depicting a battlefield with demons and knights charging toward each other from opposite directions.

"I doubt you do," Thion continued, his gaze sweeping across the students. "After all, you haven't been taught the true nature of past wars with demons. What you've experienced so far are just fights—skirmishes at best. But war? That is something entirely different."

The air in the hall grew heavier as the magical diagram behind him shifted. Scenes of devastation played out—villages consumed by flames, knights and soldiers locked in brutal combat, monstrous demons rampaging through the battlefield. It wasn't just a clash of blades and magic; it was chaos, suffering, and death.

"War is not just about fighting," Thion said, his tone growing sharper. "It's about endurance. Strategy. Sacrifice. It's about making decisions that could mean life or death for hundreds—thousands—of people. And most importantly, it's about surviving."

A few students swallowed hard, the earlier excitement in their eyes dimming as the images before them burned into their minds.

"And that," Thion continued, "is exactly what your final exam will simulate."

The hall erupted into murmurs, some students whispering to each other in concern, while others sat stiffly, processing his words.

Thion raised a hand, and the noise instantly died down. "Your exam will be a large-scale battle simulation—a war scenario against a full demon invasion. You won't be divided into squads like in your midterm exam. All 100 of you will work as one. It won't be just about fighting; you will have to defend, strategize, and adapt in real-time. But most importantly, your main priority will be to protect the holographic civilians. And let me be clear..." He paused, his piercing gaze locking onto the students.

"The difficulty of this exam will be nothing like what you've faced before. Even if your midterms had been reality, this will be even more real."

A ripple of unease spread through the crowd.

"For the duration of the simulation, the holographic system of the dome that will be used will be enhanced to replicate the true brutality of war. Pain, exhaustion, injuries—everything will feel as real as possible, even death. And unlike your usual sessions, there will be no guaranteed safety. If you make a mistake, if you hesitate, if you lose focus..." Thion's eyes darkened. "You will face the consequences."

Ariana shifted uncomfortably, the thought of experiencing something that mimicked real war making her stomach twist.

Asher, on the other hand, had a grin on his face, a competitive gleam in his eyes. "Now we're talking."

Dylan, however, slumped in his seat. "Of course, they'd make it hell for us..." he muttered.

Ignoring the mixed reactions, Thion continued, "For this exam, your leaders will be Sheila Granger as the main leader and Chris Rature as the assistant. These two will bear the responsibility of making critical decisions. If they fail, you fail. If they succeed, you succeed. Leadership, teamwork, and adaptability will determine your outcome."

A few heads turned toward Sheila and Chris. It was clear that most of the pressure would be on them—especially Sheila.

Thion's expression remained unreadable. "Your final exam begins in five days. Use your time wisely, because once it starts..." He snapped his fingers, and the battlefield projection behind him erupted into fire and blood.

"There will be no mercy."

As Thion was about to utter his final words to the students, a voice suddenly cut through the hall, interrupting him.

"Is this some kind of joke? Because I really hope it is," Chris, who had been silently listening until now, spoke up, his green eyes flashing with anger.

Thion turned his gaze toward him, unfazed. "Is there something you wish to address, Prince Rature?" he asked, deliberately acknowledging Chris's status.