

ShadowBound 231

Chapter 231: End Of Semester Exam 2

"Alright, listen up!" Sheila snapped, slicing clean through the noise with her voice. "We're splitting into three main units. We have no idea where the demons will strike, so we need eyes and steel on all fronts."

The air stiffened, all attention locked on her.

"The western front covers the mountains," she continued. "It's the clearest route for a large-scale assault."

She pointed firmly at Liam, Asher, and Lucian. "You three command it. Take thirty-seven of our strongest with you."

Asher cracked his knuckles, flashing a cocky grin. "About time. Thought blondie was gonna hoard all the command."

Lucian remained silent, just nodding, arms folded like stone.

Sheila pressed on. "South front—Max, Charlotte, Logan—you'll take twenty-two."

Max shot her a thumbs-up, cool as ever, while Charlotte's golden eyes gleamed like a predator on the hunt.

"Northern front is me and Chris," Sheila added, glancing sideways at him. "We'll hold it down with eighteen. We're the anchor—if we fall, the rest collapses."

Chris smirked with that sharp, knowing edge of his.

"And Dylan and Ariana will lead the reserve unit, guarding the city with thirteen others," Sheila finished. "Their role is to reinforce where needed and protect civilians if the fight pushes too close."

She let that hang before driving the point home. "Now, listen carefully—the demons could come from anywhere: one side, two sides, or even all three at once. If they attack the west, the south unit immediately backs them up. The north unit will hold position for ten minutes before deciding whether to reinforce, in case there's a second attack elsewhere."

She paced slightly, voice steady. "Same deal if the attack comes from the south. The west backs them first, then we hold. If the north gets hit, the west shifts to us, and the south holds position before joining the fighting."

Her gaze swept the group. "The west unit has the strongest numbers—you're the mobile force that backs up wherever needed. The south unit is lighter and faster, but I need you tight on reactions."

She took a breath, letting the silence settle. "Questions?"

Chris casually raised a finger, tone dripping with playful venom.

"Yeah, got one." His smirk was sharp. "Is this strategy about beating demons or making sure you keep the crown on your head?"

Murmurs stirred like wind through tall grass.

Sheila's brows twitched. "We don't have time for this, Chris."

But Chris, calm and charged with purpose, stepped forward. "You're overloading the west. Sure, it sounds smart—strongest fighters, largest squad—but what if you're wrong? What if they hit the south hard, faster than the west can get there? Max's crew won't last long under a heavy push."

Tension coiled tighter as more students glanced between them.

"And the north?" Chris kept pressing, voice smooth but sharp. "Eighteen people, plus two leaders who barely see eye to eye. Feels like we're just a delay tactic, stalling until backup crawls in."

Sheila's voice cooled, dangerously calm. "Are you finished?"

Chris's grin stretched. "Almost." He leaned closer, words laced with challenge. "Your reserves are too far inside the city. If the north or south collapses, Dylan and Ariana won't reach us fast enough. We'll be overrun before they even get into position."

The silence deepened.

Chris delivered the final blow. "This whole setup? Smells like you're trying to keep me leashed."

Some students shifted uncomfortably. A few nodded.

Sheila's jaw tightened. "This isn't about you—"

Chris cut in, voice low but electric. "Then send me west. Put me where the real fight's going to be."

The words hit like a hammer, dropping into the silence.

His grin sharpened further. "Unless you're scared I'll win this war without you."

Now, the air was thick—electric. All eyes burned into Sheila, waiting to see if she'd stand her ground or flinch.

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Sheila stared at Chris for a long moment, her gaze unwavering, before it flicked toward Liam. He hadn't said a word throughout the exchange, his silence like a calm before the storm. She sought comfort there, a quiet reassurance in his steady presence. With a deep breath, she finally exhaled, a sly smirk playing on her lips as she turned her gaze back to Chris.

"You're naive," she said, voice laced with an almost taunting calm. "And you lack the vision to see the bigger picture, just like Headmaster Thion said." The words slid off her tongue like honey. The sly smile on her lips made Chris's confident grin falter, just a fraction.

"Watch your mouth, outcast," Chris muttered under his breath, his voice barely a whisper, but filled with venom.

Sheila leaned in just slightly, enough to catch the words. "Hit a nerve?"

Chris didn't respond right away. His eyes narrowed, but he held his ground, his jaw tight with frustration.

"Let me ask you this," Sheila continued, her tone sharpening, "aren't you the second-ranked, the strongest lightning affinity user we have? Yes, yes, you are. And alongside me, I think we make a damn good powerhouse—stronger than the entire west team, in fact. And with 16 other students, do we really need backup?" Her gaze held steady, daring him to argue. "Yet, all I hear from you is how you're not strong enough to hold off whatever demon might attack us."

Her words sliced through the tension like a knife. The smirk never left her face.

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Chris's eyes burned like a storm about to snap, but he swallowed the fire, locking it behind clenched teeth. Sheila had dug deep, and it showed—his sharp glare betrayed the turmoil brewing inside. The silence between them crackled like static, thick enough to taste.

'She's baiting him perfectly,' Liam mused, hands still shoved in his pockets, watching the clash like a hawk. 'Chris'll have no choice but to prove himself now.'

"So," Sheila purred, voice smooth as silk laced with steel, "what's it gonna be, Chris? Gonna keep flapping your gums, or finally step up and lead like you claim you can?" Her eyes flicked down, amusement playing on her lips. "Because last I checked, leadership isn't just flexing your muscles. It's about vision. Strategy. Trust. Knowing when to hold the line and when to charge."

A ripple of discomfort passed through a few students, but no one dared to look away.

Chris inhaled sharply, pride smarting under the weight of her words. "You think this is about me?" he growled, voice low. "I'm doing what I have to do to keep everyone alive. You might be ranked number one, but that doesn't mean I'll roll over for a sloppy plan."

"Oh?" Sheila tilted her head, voice dripping with mockery. "If you were in charge, how would you play it?" She stepped closer, tone cool as a knife's edge. "Come on, Chris, enlighten us. All I hear is thunder—no lightning."

Chris's mouth parted, but hesitation stopped him cold. He didn't have a polished answer, not one that wouldn't sound like bluster. His fists clenched, but no words came out.

From the sidelines, Asher let out a loud, exaggerated groan. "Are you two done playing King and Queen of Stubborn Mountain? Or should we wait 'til the demons RSVP?"

Before Sheila could bark a command to rally up, the world shifted. The very air grew heavy, like a weight pressing down on their lungs.

The presence crashed into them like a tidal wave.

Everyone froze—eyes wide, bodies tense—as the suffocating aura settled across the battlefield. Even the reserve team, miles away near the city's edge, felt it, halting mid-step as dread wrapped around them like chains.

'This feeling...' Liam thought, hand sliding to the hilt of his sword, 'same as those blood demons—but not entirely close.'

Above them, the sky darkened further, clouds bleeding into black as rain began to fall in slow, heavy drops.

Then, as if drawn by instinct, every gaze snapped upward—toward the towering silhouette perched atop the mountain.

The figure stood tall, monstrous, and unnatural—seven, maybe eight feet in height. Two long, jagged horns jutted from its skull, its hulking frame bristling with power. In one massive hand, it gripped a weapon, though the distance made it impossible to tell what kind.

Beneath its looming shadow, the mountain's base erupted as hordes of demons poured out like an endless nightmare. Feral-class beasts snarled and tore at the ground, while towering Titanborne monsters shook the earth with every step. Their numbers easily dwarfed the students.

At the apex, the horned figure raised its weaponized arm, a silent command echoing through the valley.

Then—

ROOOAAARRR!

The horde answered.

Like a crashing wave, the demons surged forward, barreling straight for the frozen students below.