

ShadowBound 247

Chapter 247: Recognition 2

"The four exceptional students who stood against a Sync-class demon—a Berserker—Sheila, Chris, Asher, and Liam," Regulus announced, his voice laced with admiration.

His gaze first landed on Sheila. "Sheila, once again, you've proven yourself as a leader," he said firmly. "Your decision-making, quick thinking, and tactical analysis were on full display today. You didn't just fight—you commanded. You saw the battlefield for what it was, assessed the threats, and guided your team accordingly. That kind of leadership is not just rare; it's invaluable."

The magical screens illuminated with clips of Sheila in action—barking orders, shielding teammates, and directing attacks with razor-sharp precision.

Regulus nodded approvingly. "Your ability to adapt and control the flow of battle was remarkable. However," his tone shifted, "there were moments where you held back, moments where you restrained your full strength. And that, Sheila, nearly and even cost you lives on that battlefield."

Sheila stiffened at his words but held his gaze.

"I'm not here to make you feel bad," Regulus added, waving a hand dismissively. "You did an outstanding job, and I want you to keep it up. Got it?" His warm smile softened the critique.

Sheila gave a small nod, absorbing his words.

Next was Chris.

Regulus turned to him. "Now, Chris," he began, "your strength is undeniable. You wield both skill and talent, and when the moment came, you faced airborne horrors with no hesitation. You even demonstrated some leadership and maturity—not quite on Sheila's level, but still commendable."

Chris raised an eyebrow but remained silent.

"You didn't just stop a herd of horrors; you made sure the cities had fewer enemies to deal with. You also searched for survivors, carrying wounded comrades—people you weren't even close to—back to safety. That," Regulus emphasized as the screens displayed Chris hauling both Charlotte and Max toward the city, "is what makes a true leader. A battlefield isn't about friends or rivals; it's about comrades."

"You, Chris Rature, really proved everyone who thought you incapable of making decisions that can benefit others."

Chris smirked and nodded, but beneath his composed exterior, his mind was simmering.

'Not as good as her, he said? How unsurprising. After everything I did for these pathetic bastards—allowing myself to be led by an outcast, teaming up with idiots I despise with my very being—I almost thought it was fun and worth it. Almost.' His gaze darkened as the magical screens replayed what he considered moments of weakness.

'Next time, I'll make them understand why I'm the only leader there is. I won't kneel before anyone. They'll be the ones kneeling before me. I will be led by no one except myself, and that's a promise I'm keeping.' His jaw clenched as his resolve solidified.

Then came Asher's turn.

"Asher, the first blue flame user in five decades," Regulus declared, "and you are not disappointing. Your flames continue to be as destructive as ever."

The screens flickered to life, showing flashes of blue fire consuming the battlefield.

"Your control has improved, and your combat instincts are sharp. But you already know that, don't you?"

Asher smirked, masking his exhaustion. "Obviously."

Regulus chuckled. "Confidence is good. Arrogance? That's a different story. Your recklessness in that fight could have backfired in more ways than one. I believe Professor Orin Vale has already warned you—fire is power, but it's also danger. To your enemies, to your allies, and to yourself if you lose control. Learn to balance ferocity with restraint."

Asher's smirk wavered, but he gave a short nod.

Regulus's eyes gleamed with interest. "Good. But we need to talk about those stunts you and your friend pulled in the last moments of the battle."

The screens shifted, displaying Asher and Liam standing side by side, both engulfed in flames, clashing with the Berserker demon like living infernos.

"And now, our final student—Liam," Regulus announced, his gaze settling on him. "You accomplished things that I can't even discuss without the Headmaster's permission. But one thing is clear—you and Asher are an unstoppable force. Lethal, precise, and easily the strongest duo among your first-year peers. There's something about the two of you that sets you apart, but you, Liam... you have something even more distinct."

The room fell into silence, the weight of his words settling in.

"Your relentless drive to win, your unwavering resolve to eliminate threats no matter the cost—you don't hesitate. Even when exhaustion threatens to break you, even when hope seems lost, you become the hope others need." Regulus's voice carried both admiration and a warning. "That kind of determination is rare. And dangerous. But today, it made all the difference."

A brief pause. Then, with a small smile, he added, "Good job. To all of you. You fought with everything you had—now keep pushing to be even better."

A wave of applause rippled through the students, brief but genuine.

Regulus then clapped his hands together. "Alright! That officially wraps things up." He turned back to Thion, smirking slightly. "Shall we dismiss them, Headmaster?"

Thion rose from his seat with a measured nod, stepping forward to face the gathered students. His sharp gaze swept over them, holding their attention before he spoke.

"You have all done well, but do not let this recognition make you complacent." His deep voice cut through the murmurs, silencing the room. "Beyond these walls, there will be no applause—only trials. What you faced today was nothing more than a glimpse, a mere shadow of the true battlefield. Strength alone will not save you. Skill alone will not be enough. Survival demands far more."

He clasped his hands behind his back, taking another step forward. "Take pride in what you have accomplished, but let that pride drive you to sharpen your blades further, to refine your magic, to fortify your minds. Because next time..." His eyes darkened with an unreadable intensity. "There won't be a controlled environment to keep you alive. There won't be second chances. There won't be reviving from the dead."

A chilling silence settled over the hall.

Then, without missing a beat, Thion turned to Regulus. "Now, have the mages dismiss them."

Regulus clapped his hands together, breaking the tension with his usual easygoing manner. "Well, you heard the Headmaster! You're all free to go. Get some rest, eat something, celebrate if you want—just don't do anything stupid." His smirk widened. "And before you run off, a little news—you've got two weeks of break before next semester begins. You can go home or stay on academy grounds, but if you're staying, don't expect gourmet meals. The kitchen staff have families too, you know. So, think carefully about where you want to spend your time off."

Excited murmurs spread through the crowd, and it was clear that most students were already making plans—few seemed interested in staying behind.

Regulus turned to the waiting mages. "Alright, send them where they need to be."

As the mages began their incantations, a voice slipped into their ears alone—Thion's unmistakable command:

"Teleport Liam Hunter to my office."

Without hesitation they continued and finished their incantations as it echoed through the hall. As they finished, a huge magical symbol covered the whole floor, shimmering with blue myst. And in a blink of an eye, the students disappeared into thin air.