

Solar Ascension

#Chapter 41: Solar History 101: Eclipsed - Read Solar Ascension Chapter 41: Solar History 101: Eclipsed

Chapter 41: Solar History 101: Eclipsed

"Scholars believed that the Eclipsed were created due to the imbalance left behind by the gods," Professor Sirius repeated, "and they seem to have only one goal, rid Aureum of every life."

He took a small pause and glanced around the room again with a small smile on his face, his gaze rested on Cass for a while before he moved in, tapping on his tablet and letting three holographic Eclipsed appear, each of a different shape and size.

One was in the shape of a bear, the other a dragon, while the third had multiple hands growing all over it.

"Eclipsed come in different shapes and forms," he explained, "some look like normal animals and creatures of myth while others look grotesque and with a shape completely unrecognizable."

"But even with all their differences, Eclipsed have one thing in common," Sirius said, looking at the faces of the students, "would anyone like to try and guess what that is?"

They were silent for a while, that is, until someone in Nox's row raised a hand. This time, instead of Cass, it was Linda.

"Yes," Professor Sirius allowed her to talk with a pleased smile on his face.

He liked when the students were interested in his classes and answering questions was one way to show their interest.

Linda adjusted her glasses before saying, "their forms seem to completely absorb light."

"That is correct," the professor said, "all Eclipsed are entities that devour light, hence the reason why, even in broad daylight, they seem to only a dark form."

"Now then," he continued, "let's talk about what most of you are actually interested in, their rankings."

With those words, he turned to the red haired boy who was still a bit embarrassed and gave him a small smile.

"Eclipsed range from tier 1 to 6, based on the level of danger they present," Professor Sirius went on with the lecture, "tier 1 being the lowest and 6 being the highest."

As he said, this successfully got the attention of most the students in here as they say up straighter.

The large majority of them were from the combat division, as shown by the black uniform they wore, so this information was very much important.

Though, that wasn't to say it was useless to the scholar, engineering or stealth divisions.

"Tier ones never actually grow past the size of a house cat," Sirius paused before chuckling, "well, except the ones in your holographic test."

"The harm caused by them has never gone past the death of a few humans without a core."

He stopped and made sure the students were still following before he continued.

"Tier twos are a problem," he said, "if left alone, they could possibly bring down an entire town, as the reports from the recently fallen Zone 9 stated."

Cass and Devon subtly turned to him, since they knew he was from there, but he had never mentioned anything about an Eclipsed attack.

Nox, on the other hand, quietly continued listening to the lecture. He'd already gotten a front-row seat to what a tier-2 Eclipsed was capable of, but that didn't mean he had any kind of trauma from it...

Well, maybe just a little, but he wasn't going to talk about it, so the two just turned back to the professor.

"Tier threes are where things start getting messy," Sirius continued, enlarging the hologram on the bear-like Eclipse, "they possess enhanced strength, speed, and, in some cases, limited intelligence. A poorly trained knight engaging one alone... rarely ends well."

"And tier fours..." Sirius exhaled and tapped his tablet again and the hologram changed to an even larger Eclipsed.

"Tier fours almost always require a coordinated party. If a tier four appears in the wild and is not neutralized within hours," he added, "a medium sized city must initiate emergency evacuation protocols....if everyone in it doesn't end up dying within the first few hours."

Students from the combat division stiffened and a few nervously swallowed, they were going to face these when they graduated?

"But, Professor," one of the students raised a hand, "why do some look normal while others look like... that?" He pointed at the many-armed creature.

Sirius smiled as though he'd been waiting for that question.

"Because not all Eclipsed are born equal. Most low-tier Eclipsed, the ones shaped like normal animals or common beasts, are incapable of using Umbra Energy, most of the times."

"Umbra Energy is the purest essence of darkness," Sirius continued. "It is not common, proven by the fact that not every Eclipsed possess the ability to use it."

He pointed at the grotesque Eclipsed.

"And those that do... almost always appear like this, no longer resembling natural creatures, but corrupted reflections of something that once was."

"So, Professor," another student raised his hand, trying, and failing, to hide the slight tremor in his voice, "you're saying... grotesque ones are automatically capable of using umbra energy?"

"Not automatically," Sirius corrected, "but usually."

He flipped to a new hologram, this one showing silhouettes arranged by size and power.

"Tier 5 and Tier 6 Eclipsed are almost always Umbra users. They can manipulate shadow, use special abilities, distort space, or even regenerate at impossible speed."

He let that sink in.

"Your instructors will teach you how to handle such encounters," he said, "for now, it wouldn't hurt to know about them."

A quiet "damn" escaped from Devon who was sitting beside Nox, who was also completely absorbed in the lecture.

"So if an Eclipsed displays the ability to manipulate Umbra energy, treat it as one rank higher despite what any scanner says," He concluded, "and maybe run?"

Linda and Cass scribbled notes furiously, completely absorbed in the lecture.

Though, Cass's reason was because he wanted more points to debunk than actually study, since this was all basically general knowledge for him.

"Of course," the professor added lightly, after a couple of minutes of tense silence, "you will not be facing anything above Tier 2 during your first-year training. Tier 3 only for supervised exercises."

Relief washed through the majority of the students in the room.

"Now then," Sirius said with a bright smile, "let's talk about rifts."

Chapter 42: Solar History 101: Rifts and SE

"You," Professor Sirius Quinn called out, pointing towards the red haired boy, "what's your name?"

The boy hesitantly looked around, but the lecturer's scary eyes were still on him so he hesitantly stood up and introduced,

"Flint," he said, "Flint Ardent."

"Would you mind telling us what rifts are?" Sirius said with a small smile on his lips, to anyone else, it'd just seem like he was a petty teacher getting back at a student, but no.

This was just his method of discipline and maybe also a way to get the kid actually interested in this class.

"Umm," Flint thought about it for a short while before replying, "a portal through which Eclipsed step into our world?"

"Correct," Sirius said with a proud smile on his face causing Flint's cheeks to take a slightly red shade.

"Rifts are portals that connect Aureum to what scholars call the Eclipsed Realm," he continued, tapping his tablet to switch the hologram to a swirling, dark vortex.

He gave a light chuckle as he added, "creative name, I know. Academics aren't exactly poets."

Well most of the class didn't seem to share his sense of humor so he just cleared his throat and went on.

"Now then," he continued, "rifts are not random holes torn into the world, though I'm sure it feels like that when one suddenly

opens in your backyard."

A few students chuckled. Most didn't but Sirius didn't seem the least bit offended.

"Rifts," he said, gesturing to the projection, "are selected zones of the Eclipsed Realm forcibly overlapping with Aureum. Think of them like... windows that were never meant to be opened."

The hologram shifted, dividing into two layers. One was of Aureum which was above, and the other was of a world that seemed to be in perpetual darkness.

"These overlapping zones vary in size," Sirius explained, circling slowly as he tapped his tablet again. The dark layer expanded... then shrunk... then expanded again.

"And their size is the first and most important indicator of danger."

He raised a single finger.

"A small rift, barely the size of a door, will usually only allow lower-tier Eclipsed through. Tier ones, and occasionally a weak tier two."

A second finger went up.

"A medium rift, something the size of a house or building, will mostly let through tier twos and threes. These are the most common types encountered around the outskirts of of Solara Prime and other Zones with light barrier."

Then he raised a third finger, pausing for effect.

"And then we have the big ones. The kind that blanket an entire street... or an entire district."

The hologram abruptly widened until it spanned nearly the entire airspace above the podium, looking like some kind of tear in the fabric of space.

"In those," Sirius said quietly, "you will find tier fours, and rarely... tier fives."

The class shifted uncomfortably.

"Tier sixes," he added with a dismissive chuckle, "do not come through rifts. If a tier six ever stepped into Aureum, we would not be having this lecture. So let's not worry about bedtime stories."

He took another pause, looking at the looks on the faces of the students, most of which were a bit pale, especially when they considered that they'd have to enter rifts to clear.

"Alright then," Sirius Quinn said, clapping both hands together, "let's leave all this doom and gloom and talk about the cool stuff, Solar energy."

This successfully regained the attention of the students as they sat up straighter. He tapped on his tablet and caused the hologram to change again.

"You see," the lecturer started, "Humanity being pushed to the brink gave birth to an idea that, at that time, would seem completely insane."

Of course most of the students here knew what humanity did, they had stolen the sun, replaced it with an artificial one and used the original one to power their tech.

Even Nox, who was from the slums, knew that.

"In their quest to harness this divine power, humans tried... well, everything," Sirius said, tone turning wry.

The hologram changed again, now showing diagrams of early Solar machinery, that was just a crude metal harnesses, and silhouettes of human bodies surrounded by blazing light.

"At first, it was simple: devices, converters, collectors and machines that could bottle sunlight the same way we bottle water."

He tapped again. The hologram zoomed in on a strange metal frame shaped like a spine, with golden veins running through it.

"But then," Sirius continued, "desperation breeds... recklessness."

A murmur ran through the first-years.

"Humans attempted to directly absorb Solar Energy. Not through cores as we do today, but through their bodies," his lips twitched into an uneasy smile. "And, unsurprisingly, this did not go well."

The hologram switched, showing how the silhouettes burnt out from the inside, collapsing like ash.

Several students grimaced at the sight.

"Most who tried died instantly," Sirius said casually, though his voice carried a bit of heaviness in them, "the human body was never meant to handle pure Solar radiation in its rawest form."

"But..." He raised a finger. "A few survived."

A new hologram popped up, this one was also of a human...or so it seemed, but this human had features that separated them from the norm.

They had elongated ears of the holographic person, which reminded Nox of Luna.

"And those survivors," he continued, tapping two fingers against his own cheek where his scales were, "developed fantasy like traits, some with eyes like mine and scales, while others look like creatures of fantasy known as elves. My clan happens to come from... one such survivor."

"Pretty cool right?" Sirius added with a smile on his face but before he could go on further a ding suddenly sounded from all the student's watches.

"Ah I guess that's all the time we get today," he said as he looked at the time, "then I guess I'll see you during our next class."

With a smile, Sirius Quinn walked out of the classroom, leaving the students behind.

Devon leaned back in his seat, stretching his arms over his head.

"Damn," he muttered, "first day and we already learn our old folks used to barbecue themselves trying to get superpowers."

Linda calmly gathered her tablet, "technically, they were attempting to—"

"We know, we know," Devon cut her off, waving a hand. "Science stuff."

He then stood up and stretched before saying, "aight then, time for something fun."

They were now supposed to head to their various divisions, which meant it was time for combat classes.

Chapter 43: The Combat Class

The admitted students were divided by divisions, the combat, Engineering, Scholar and Stealth Divisions, each identifiable by the different color uniform they wore.

The scholars wore white, Engineers wore a darker blue and the stealth division wore midnight purple and finally, the combat division wore black, the same Nox and Devon currently had on.

The two walked through the corridor and towards their next class, the combat classes.

That was where they'd be trained to actually handle Eclipsed and use their Solar tech as actual weapons.

"Man, I'm so hyped right now," Devon said as they continued walking toward the combat room, practically bouncing with each step.

Nox, meanwhile, walked with his hands in his pockets and expression neutral....who was he kidding, even he was excited.

His dream of becoming a Solar Knight was coming through, and properly using a solar tech was one of the biggest steps.

Yes, the SE within any solar tech guided him on its use, but he still needed actual training, so of course he was also hyped.

But he wouldn't let it show.... at least not too much.

"So," Devon turned to him with a grin that practically reached his ears, "what kinda Solar Tech you lookin' forward to the most? Like—favorite weapon. Everybody's got one."

Nox blinked.

That... was a good question.

They continued down the corridor, passing other combat division students in identical black uniforms, some chatting about gauntlets, others boasting about swords they hadn't even touched yet.

Devon nudged him. "C'mon, don't tell me you ain't thought about it. You seriously gonna walk into combat class without even imaginin' yourself swingin' somethin' cool?"

Nox hesitated, then sighed.

"...Maybe."

Devon groaned dramatically. "Bro. You gotta have something. Gauntlet? Sword? Rifle? Staff? Or maybe daggers?"

"No," Nox quickly said, "definitely not daggers."

The best a pair of daggers had done for him was almost getting him killed, yes it had all worked out in the end, but all that wouldn't have happened if the damn things hadn't got stuck in the first place.

Thinking about it made him involuntarily shiver.

"You good?" Devon asked, looking at his reaction.

"Yeah, " he nodded, "just a bad memory."

Devon looked at him for a second longer before sighing, "aight then, no daggers."

"A sword," Nox finally answered, "maybe even a staff, but definitely not daggers."

A sword, because it looked cool and a staff because it ensured the maximum possible distance between him and the Eclipsed.

Devon nodded slowly, then burst out laughing.

"A staff?" he snorted, "sounds boring, I prefer getting up close and smashing their Eclipsed faces in, with my meteor fist."

Nox stared at him for a while before asking, "...Meteor Fist?"

"Yeah!" Devon said, throwing a mock punch forward. "I'm gon' be droppin' star-powered haymakers on anything that even breathes wrong near me."

"I see," Nox nodded in understanding as they continued forward.

"But a sword is cool tho," Devon said after a while of walking, "but it just ain't my type of weapon."

"Right," Nox nodded and the two continued forward until they came upon a large door in front of which other first year combat students stood.

"Aight," Devon said, "we're here."

The combat training hall doors were open, and senior students in full combat gear walked out, some sweaty, some limping but they all had one thing in common, they looked completely beaten up.

"Oh it's the first years," one of them commented as he looked at the group of first years about to walk into the combat room, "good luck."

Before the group could say anything, the seniors walked away, definitely heading to the medbay or directly back to their hostel for a long nap thanks to the monster in there.

The first years just shrugged and walked into the combat room.

Inside, the room was massive, far larger than the lecture halls, with reinforced walls, training platforms, drones, and multiple weapons racks hidden behind transparent walls of glass.

Behind the glass were Solar techs and Nox's eyes immediately turned to stars as he looked at the endless amount of Solar Techs in the combat room.

"Is this heaven?" He muttered walking in a trance like state towards the glass cases.

Back in the slums, there was no way he would see Solar tech of this quality. All he had were from the scrap yards.

He was sure that selling a single Solar tech from beyond this glass could feed every single person in his old neighborhood for a month.

He pressed his hand against the glass like a starving man staring at a buffet.

The Solar tech went from gauntlets to swords to even rings that looked similar to the ones Astra used.

It was like some type of gold mine, unfortunately, he couldn't hoard them, so he could just stare.

"Quite the opposite," a familiar voice snapped him out of his solar tech hoarding mode, causing him to turn around.

Most other candidates, especially those that were in the same room as him during the Craft test, were surprised at his actions.

It had already been established that he was crazy so this wasn't out of the norm for an insane person.

Though some still looked at him with disgust, especially Flint, the red haired noble boy.

He still wondered why people like Nox made it into the academy, after all, there was nothing that seemed special about him.

Even his combat scores were unknown, so how had he made it into this division? He'd have to deal with it, but not now.

Nox's eyes immediately widened as he faced the person that had replied to his question.

Standing on a platform that could comfortably fit two people were two familiar faces.

One was the bear like man, that had over seen the combat test, Radiant Garron Boar.

The man looked as intimidating as ever, but on his face, which always seemed like he held a frown, was an even darker frown.

The reason for the frown was standing right next to him with a smile on her face.

"Welcome to hell, my dear lab rat."

Chapter 44: Choose Your Weapon

Nox froze the moment he was faced with Astra, yes he knew she was also a teacher at the academy but not in his first year.

And by the look on instructors Garron's face, she definitely wasn't supposed to be here.

All the other students turned to him since she was directly looking at him, making it obvious that Nox was the lab rat being referred to.

"Y'know her?" Devon asked, eyes flicking between Nox and Astra. "Like, personally know her? 'Cause everybody knows who Ascended Dawn is, but that ain't what I'm askin'."

"You could say that," Nox said with a sigh, "she's the one that saved me from the tier two Eclipsed attack that happened back in zone 9."

"I see," Devon nodded, but that still gave him no idea why she called him a lab rat but he didn't ask further.

Flint, on the other hand, finally understood how Nox had gotten into the Academy.

It had to be favoritism.

After all, Astra Dawn was infamous for her... questionable behavior. Not bad, just eccentric. She disliked working in teams, avoided group missions unless forced, and rarely interacted with people unless absolutely necessary.

It wasn't hatred, she simply saw most social encounters as a waste of her time.

Yet suddenly, the very same woman who ignored entire squads had taken an interest in someone.

And that same someone had been admitted into the academy even with a result so strange.

"But I'm not wrong though," Astra suddenly interrupted their thoughts as she started speaking to herself, "I won't be taking it easy on them just because they're first years."

"..."

The students were surprised at her actions but didn't dare question it, after all, she was Ascended Astra Dawn.... Questioning her actions were not the smartest of decisions, especially if you valued your life.

"Ascended Dawn, I believe the first years were assigned to me," Garron interrupted her conversation, with herself, "so there no reason for you to still be here."

"Don't sweat old man," Astra waved her hand, "the blind bat already knows I'll be taking over the first years from now on, so you can handle the second years."

She was also a combat instructor, but just for the second years, the same ones that had walked out of the combat room limping.

Though they were in pain, they received the greatest news when Astra informed them that she'll no longer be their combat instructor, hence the reason they wished the first years good luck when they met.

Garron frowned at her words, of course he didn't mind letting her take over, but this was just abrupt and he hadn't received any information about this from the headmistress, hence his hesitation.

But the next second, his watch let out a ding as a message came in. It was directly from the headmistress, basically confirming Astra's taking over the first years causing him to just sigh.

He really was looking forward to molding this new batch of students into proper Solar Knights, but still... they'd meet again in their second year, so it wasn't the end of the world.

"Fine," Garron said with a resigned exhale. "They're all yours, Ascended Dawn."

Astra smiled before turning her attention back to the first years.

The class collectively froze in place.

"Alright, kiddos," she said, clapping her hands together once, "welcome to the combat division. My division, in other words, hell."

The students gulped in nervousness, she didn't seem like she was joking, in the least bit.

"First thing's first," She turned towards the glass casing that held the solar techs before pointing the students towards them, "get yourself a weapon."

Although they were nervous, that was quickly overshadowed by the excitement of a new solar tech of their choice, so they quickly scrambled towards it.

"Damn, these are sick," Devon said as he quickly picked out his Solar tech and put it on.

Nox turned to him and noticed that, he was right. The Solar tech on his hands were pretty cool.

They were white fingerless gloves that went a bit past his wrists, on the knuckles were small metals and running through the glove were SE pathways that looked like golden lines, adding to the glove's design.

Though there was one thing that confused Nox, so he asked, "gloves."

"Right, these ain't gloves," Devon answered, "they just need to be activated."

"I see," Nox nodded in understanding.

"Whatchu got?" Devon stopped admiring the gloves and turned towards him, only to see that his hands were empty.

Some students had quickly scrambled towards the glass cases and chosen solar tech that either looked cool or made them look cool, completely avoiding practicality or what felt right in their hands.

Which meant that most of the swords had been chosen, leaving Nox with only a few options.

He had tried multiple of the swords but none of the felt like they belong, and the time for choosing solar tech was soon up.

"Alright," Astra's voice soon rang out, "gather up."

Nox now had no choice but to randomly grab a solar tech without looking, before rushing to where they were meant to gather up.

"Since you all have chosen your solar tech," she clapped her hands again and the glass cases suddenly retreated into the walls completely disappearing from their sight.

"This will be the only free Solar tech the academy will provide you," Astra informed, looking at all of their faces before stopping at Nox's and looking at his selected weapon before she chuckled, "if you want a better one, or one that you think you can use better, then you'll have to buy them yourselves."

Nox immediately froze at her words, before slowly and hesitantly looked down, at the solar tech in his hand, only for his eyes to widen the next second.

He could've sworn he grabbed a staff, so what the hell was this.

"What's that?" Devon asked as he also looked at the solar tech.

Nox had no idea, all he knew was that it's cylindrical metallic object with SE pathways all around it.

What was he supposed to do with this? Throw it and hope the Eclipsed was puppy enough to go fetch?

'I demand a reselection,' he mentally cried, 'I'll take the daggers.'

But Aria didn't care whether they like what they chose or not, as she simply continued.

"Alright then," she said with a pleasant smile that did not match the student's impending doom. "Let's start with something light."

"For today's lesson, I'll have to see what I'm working with," she said, "you all will be paired up and spar."

A student suddenly raised a hand, and the others slowly turned to look at him, Nox immediately recalled who he was, he was the same kid that had asked whether they could team up during the combat test.

Astra turned to him, "...Yes?"

"Ascended Dawn," the boy said cautiously, "um—are we...are we going to be sparring with our actual solar tech?"

"Yes," she simply said, "and don't worry, as long as you don't immediately die, the medbay can fix you up, good as new."

The students nervously swallowed, she didn't seem to be joking in the least bit.

"No then—" but before her words could be completed, a familiar sense of dread washed over Nox and he stiffly turned towards the entrance.

"Ayla?"

Chapter 45: Fiery Hobbit

"Right, she's also supposed to be here," Astra said to herself as she looked at Ayla walk in, "of course I didn't forget."

That was a lie, she had completely forgotten that the headmistress's kid was supposed to be part of the first years, a fact that the voices in her head called her out on.

Nox had just confirmed that he was the only who got the feeling of dread in her presence, after all, the other students didn't even seem to have noticed her until Astra spoke up.

Like previously, he allowed his SE to freely flow within him as he suppressed the feeling of dread, allowing him to fully look at her.

Ayla, like all the other students in the Combat room was wearing a black uniform with golden lines around the neck and cuffs.

Without a change in her expression...or even one on her face, she walked forwards until she was standing next to Nox.

"You're not scared of me anymore," she commented the moment she was close enough to him.

"I found a way to suppress it," Nox muttered with a small sigh.

"Good," she nodded without a single change in her expression, "I don't have to try and smile again, it hurts my face."

With that, the two turned towards Astra who was observing them before sighing and saying, "that makes thirty one."

Usually, the combat division always had around fifty students but due to the unforeseen circumstances during the test, only thirty...well, thirty one students managed to pass, hence the number.

"Who the hell is she?" Flint whispered under his breath, but unfortunately for him, Atla clearly heard and turned to him.

The moment her grey eyes locked on him, a never felt before dread washed over him. He felt like a mouse in front of a predator and without even realizing it, he had stopped breathing and there was sweat pooling on his forehead.

He took a step back in fear, but lucky him, Astra pulled all their attention towards her.

"Alright then," she clapped her hands, causing Flint to snap out of the state he was put in, "start pairing up."

Ayla turned to Nox but before she could request they paired up, Astra cut in, "I'll be your sparring partner, shadow girl."

She hadn't come up with a suitable nickname for Ayla yet, so she was going with shadow girl for now.

Ayla frowned before pointing to Nox, "I want him as my partner."

Devon, by Nox's side, chuckled before leaning in and whispering, "looks like you're the new chick magnet after Cass."

Nox just sighed in defeat at his words, he could explain that Astra was only interested in him because of his ability to absorb solar Energy without a core, but Devon wouldn't believe, since no human was capable of that.

And as for Ayla's case, he'd prefer not to explain, after all, what would he say? She's interested in him because of his scent? That was even worse.

So he wisely chose to remain silent.

"No," Astra shook her head, "he'll only be your sparring partner when I say so, for now you're stuck with me."

Ayla seemed to have a displeased expression on her face, but she then remembered what the headmistress had said so she just nodded.

"Hey man," Devon turned to Nox, "wanna spar with—"

He didn't even get to finish before a voice interrupted.

"You," the two turned towards the direction of the voice only to spot the red haired kid, Flint, walking towards them.

"Spar with me," he demanded, the moment he was close enough.

"Yeah, but I already got a partner," Devon said in response, only to have Flint look at him with what seemed like disgust.

"Not you," he said before pointing at Nox, "him."

Nox turned to Devon, his surprise evident on his face before turning back towards Flint.

"Me?" He pointed at himself and asked.

"Yes you," Flint said, "I believe you don't deserve to be here and I will prove it by beating you in this spar."

Devon blinked in surprise, then slowly leaned toward Nox again.

"Ayo... how do you know this little man?"

You see, Nox was short...a lot more so than he would admit, but Flint was even more so and he very much hated being called short.

Nox didn't respond. He was too busy trying to figure out what he'd done to attract this brand of trouble.

"What?" Flint spoke up again, "are you scared? Do you dare to prove that you being here is not because you caught Ascended Dawn's attention?"

Nox was even more confused now, "listen kid—"

"Kid?"

Well, that successfully set Flint off.

A visible vein popped on the side of his forehead as he marched right up to Nox, who had to tilt his head down slightly to look at him, something Flint noticed immediately and absolutely hated.

But it was definitely a first for Nox, especially here in the city since everyone looked like giants compared to him and he had to admit, it felt good.

"I'm not a kid," Flint snapped, his jaw tightening. "I'm eighteen, I'm only short because my growth spurt hasn't kicked in yet—"

Devon snickered, quite Loudly at that.

Flint slowly turned to him with the slow-burning rage of a lit fuse.

"Something funny?" he asked through clenched teeth.

Devon raised both hands. "Nah, lil' man, you good. Keep goin'."

Flint's expression got even darker as he was called little man by Devon, but for some reason, he only had a problem with Nox.

Astra on the other hand looked at the two with an amused expression, yes Flint was accusing the academy of playing favorites but it didn't bother her in the least bit.

Instead, she was entertained by the exchange, the second years were rarely, if ever, this entertaining.

'Are you going to stop them?' on of the voices in her head asked.

"Why?" Astra asked.

'Because this is supposed to be a combat class,' another reminded.

"Right," she said loudly, realizing that she was supposed to be assessing the kids.

"Alright then," she said loudly pulling their attention towards her, "Nox, you'll spar with the little."

Astra paused mid-sentence, her eyes narrowing ever so slightly at Flint as if searching for the right nickname.

"—with the fiery hobbit."

Flint's soul visibly left his body, he wanted to scream that he wasn't short, but this was Ascended Dawn, doing that would just be asking for death.

So he turned to Nox and muttered, "ready yourself," before walking back to his previous position , leaving behind a very confused Nox.