

ShadowBound 178

Chapter 178: Back To The Academy

As the sun began to rise, the group was already set, each of them suiting up in their academy uniforms and equipping their weapons.

Liam was the first to be ready, stationed outside the cave on watch. He sat perched on a sturdy tree branch, arms resting on his knees as he scanned the forest.

'I think because the exam is over, the academy must have sealed the demons again,' Liam thought, exhaling softly. 'Well, it's for the best. This place is starting to get under my skin.'

Minutes passed in silence before the others emerged from the cave, their expressions a mix of anticipation and relief. Edith adjusted the straps of her shield on her back, her sword sheathed neatly at her side. Karla tightened her gloves, her sword secured at her hip. Robin slung his quiver over his shoulder, while Lucian walked out casually, his gauntlet summoning rings glinting in the morning light.

"Hey, Liam. Anything off?" Edith asked, glancing up at him.

Liam didn't answer right away. Instead, he pushed off the branch and free-fell, landing smoothly in a slight crouch, hands still tucked in his pockets.

"No, nothing," he finally said. "I think since the exam is done, the academy has sealed the demons once again."

"I see," Edith nodded. "Then we just have to wait for the academy to summon us—"

Before she could finish, Karla vanished in a swirl of white mist.

Lucian smirked. "Looks like it's time." Without another word, he disappeared as well.

Robin was next, his body dissolving into thin air, followed by Liam, who vanished without hesitation.

Edith, now alone, exhaled before her vision blurred. The last thing she saw was the fading remnants of the sunrise before the world around her shifted into nothingness.

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The Dark Knight Academy, Grand Observation Dome

The vast space of the dome flickered with light as students began reappearing one by one. Some arrived in groups, others in pairs, while a few materialized alone. The battlefield exam had left its mark—some students looked utterly drained, their once-proud forms now lean and exhausted. Others still held their composure, seemingly unaffected. There were those who grinned, relieved to be back, while others bore scowls, their irritation likely stemming from incidents during the exam. Stay tuned with

Within moments, all 100 students had returned, filling the dome with an uproar of chatter. Stories of the exam buzzed in the air—tales of victories, betrayals, and unexpected challenges. The energy in the room was a chaotic blend of excitement and tension.

Then, a single voice cut through the noise.

It was loud yet composed, demanding attention without effort.

Every student recognized it instantly, even though they had only heard it twice before.

As their heads turned toward the viewing balcony, they saw him—the Headmaster, Thion Layenhardt.

Dressed impeccably as always, his white robe with dark and golden patterns complemented his flowing white beard and hair. His presence alone was enough to silence the entire hall.

"I welcome you all back from your battlefield exam," Thion spoke, his gaze sweeping across the gathered students. "I hope you all had a great time with your groups."

A few disgruntled grunts echoed in response. Clearly, not everyone had enjoyed their experience.

"Regardless of what happened, the exam is over," he continued, undeterred. "Your actions and decisions in Vlardia have already been evaluated. Your scores have been recorded."

That caused a brief hush, tension replacing the murmurs.

"Now, I originally planned to address this after the theory exam results, but I see no reason to delay." He let the words sink in before continuing. "There was something I withheld before the exam began—though it changes nothing now."

A pause.

"Extra points have been awarded to individuals who proved themselves in key areas during the exam."

At that, the murmurs returned—this time filled with surprise.

Thion raised a hand, silencing them before he proceeded. "Let's begin. The first group of students to be recognized are those who displayed exceptional leadership. They showed that they have what it takes to guide their peers."

His eyes shifted slightly before he announced the first name.

"Sheila Granger."

The crowd parted slightly as all eyes fell on Sheila, who now had her hair tied back in a ponytail. She hesitated for only a second before stepping forward confidently, making her way to the front.

Thion nodded approvingly. "You have once again proven why you hold the number one rank among your peers—and why you are the princess of the Crescent Kingdom. Your leadership during this exam was exceptional. You demonstrated a clear understanding of what is expected of a leader, taking

command with both strength and wisdom. For that, you are awarded 20 points—and 5 points to your group as well."

Shouts of her name erupted from her group, their enthusiasm ringing through the hall.

Thion waited a moment before calling the next name.

"Edith Roswell."

Edith froze. She had not expected to be recognized.

After a few seconds of hesitation, she exhaled sharply and made her way through the crowd, stepping up beside Sheila.

Sheila shot her a warm smile, which Edith returned with a subtle nod.

"You, Edith, proved that you can lead anyone, regardless of rank," Thion stated. "You put your people first, ensuring their survival and success. The trust your teammates placed in you—and the trust you placed in them—set you apart. For that, you are awarded 15 points, with 5 additional points to your group."

Unlike Sheila's group, who had erupted into cheers, Edith's reception was... lackluster.

Only Karla cheered enthusiastically, her voice standing out in the silence. Robin hesitated before nervously clapping along.

Lucian and Liam?

They just stood there, offering nothing.

Edith clenched her jaw. 'Those bastards don't know when to at least show some appreciation.'

Thion didn't comment on the disparity and simply moved on.

"Last but not least—Maxwell Samson."

Max moved through the crowd as he stepped forward.

"To be frank, Maxwell," Thion said, "you were simply a better leader than those who didn't make it to this list. That said, you did well in guiding your group. 10 points for you, and 5 for your team."

Unlike Edith's group, Maxwell's team roared in approval, clapping him on the back.

The energy in the hall shifted—some students now eager to hear more, others growing anxious about whether their names would be called next.

"Alright," Thion continued. "For the second group of students, their recognition is purely individual—awarded based on their significant contributions in battle against the demons."

A hush fell over the dome as the students waited in anticipation.

"First, Liam Hunter."

At the mention of his name, Liam exhaled slightly before stepping forward. He moved with his usual composed demeanor, standing a short distance away from Sheila's group.

"Among all the students who participated in the exam, you achieved the highest number of kills," Thion announced.

Murmurs rippled through the crowd.

"While teamwork was the primary focus of this exam, your choices—though often independent—were made to protect your teammates and secure victory."

A pause.

"More importantly, you eliminated at least one demon from every known class encountered during the exam, except one which you left for your team to handle. The Titanborne doesn't count since it was a team effort allowing you to have the final blow. Anyway..."

Another pause.

"37 Feral-class kills."

Silence.

"And one Advanced Horror-class kill."

The dome erupted into stunned whispers.

Even Liam's own teammates were visibly shaken.

They had only witnessed him take down two Feral-class demons themselves. When he mentioned that he had intercepted a wave of incoming demons during their fight with the Titanborne, they hadn't thought much of it. But now? Thirty-seven?

The weight of that revelation hung in the air.

"For this, you are awarded 15 points," Thion concluded.

The astonishment in the room hadn't faded when Thion moved on.

"Next, Asher Hawthorne."

With an irritated scoff, Asher strode forward, standing to Liam's right.

"Tch. Looks like I lost, huh?" he muttered.

Liam merely shrugged. "Technically, yes. But thanks to you, I was able to rack up that many kills."

"Shut up," Asher snorted. "I only taught you that for my own benefit."

Thion ignored their exchange and continued, "You secured 24 Feral-class kills and three Horror-class kills. For that, you are awarded 10 points."

Asher simply crossed his arms, nodding to himself.

Finally, Thion called the last name.

"Chris Rature."

A visible frown formed on Chris's face as he stepped forward. He had expected to rank higher—especially above the two people he despised the most.

Positioning himself at Liam's left, his irritation was evident.

"One Titanborne-class kill—achieved alone," Thion stated. "And five Horror-class kills. For that, you are awarded 5 points."

Chris clenched his jaw but said nothing.

With all three standing before the students, Thion addressed the academy once more.

"These individuals distinguished themselves through their combat prowess during the exam. I expect you all to recognize their efforts and give them the respect they deserve."

Applause broke out across the dome, first for Sheila's group, then for Liam's group. Some clapped genuinely, others begrudgingly, but none could deny their achievements.

Thion let the moment linger before continuing.

"That concludes today's battlefield exam announcements. You will all be recalled to Beacon Hall for further information regarding the remainder of your semester."

Then, his voice took on a pointed sharpness.

"And for those of you who failed to meet expectations—as I warned before the exam began, expulsion awaits you."

That single sentence sent a chill through the room.

The expressions of many students shifted from relief to unease, their earlier smiles fading as reality set in.

"You are now dismissed," Thion declared. "Tomorrow at noon, you will be summoned to Beacon Hall. Do not be late."

And with that, the gathering came to an end.