

ShadowBound 186

Chapter 186: A New System

As the sun rose over Dark Knight Academy, its golden rays washed over the towering structures, signaling the start of a new day. It was the weekend, and as soon as daylight broke, the first-years made their way to the cafeteria for breakfast, knowing that today was significant.

By midday, as the sun reached its peak in the sky, a summons was issued—every first-year was to gather in Beacon Hall. They all knew what this meant. It was time for their results to be announced.

As the students entered the grand hall, a mixture of tension and unease hung thick in the air. The once lively chatter was filled with anxious murmurs, many students were on edge. Some even looked on the verge of tears, dreading what was to come. The Headmaster had made it clear—poor performance in both the theoretical and battlefield exams could lead to expulsion.

Unlike previous gatherings, where the stage would be lined with high-ranking knights and esteemed figures, today, only three individuals stood at the front: Headmaster Thion, his assistant Gordon Rvack, and Mystica Moonstone.

As the students whispered amongst themselves, the Headmaster stepped forward to the pulpit. The moment his imposing figure moved, silence fell.

"Good afternoon, first-years," Thion began, his deep voice resonating through the hall. "I trust you enjoyed your rest yesterday... and for some of you, I hope you made the most of your final meal and night at this academy."

A heavy weight settled over the room. His words struck deep, confirming their worst fears.

"Today, your results for both exams will be revealed," he continued. "You will also be given a rundown of how the rest of this semester will proceed."

The students braced themselves, but instead of immediately revealing their results, Thion took a different approach.

"But before we display your scores, let's discuss what comes next—your true academic and training experience."

Confusion rippled through the hall. True academic and training experience? What had they been doing for the past three months if not real training?

Thion let the question hang in the air before he continued.

"The primary purpose of these exams was to assess whether or not you belong here," he stated bluntly. "Many of you may have confidence in your physical strength or magical prowess, but when placed in a real battlefield scenario, that confidence was shattered. Some of you learned firsthand that raw power means nothing without the ability to use it effectively."

Murmurs broke out among the students. He wasn't wrong—many of them had struggled, realizing that sheer strength alone wouldn't carry them through real combat.

"Not all of you are meant to be front-line warriors," Thion went on. "Not everyone is meant to be the hero at the center of battle. Some of you are more suited to support roles, while others may even be liabilities in direct combat. But that does not mean you are without value."

The hall remained silent, every word sinking in.

"Throughout the exams, many of you demonstrated exceptional survival instincts. Some of you were able to craft weapons, build barriers, or construct shelters to aid your team. Even if you failed in direct combat, your skills proved invaluable in other ways."

A shift in the atmosphere occurred—not of relief, but of realization. Some students who had believed they had failed completely now saw their actions in a new light.

"Now that we have evaluated your actual strengths and weaknesses," Thion declared, "we shall introduce the academy's true learning system."

"We at Dark Knight Academy, with the support of the Tempest Kingdom, have forged an alliance with Beau Magic Academy in Zone 9," Thion began. "Thanks to this partnership, our academy is no longer limited to the traditional teachings of knighthood. We aim not only to shape warriors but to guide you toward a path that will best serve your future."

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"Some of you possess a keen interest in alchemy, yet due to family expectations, you were forced into the path of a knight. Others may find their true calling in forgemastery, yet you stand here, bound by duty rather than passion. But now, that no longer has to be the case."

A murmur spread through the hall as Thion's words sank in.

"Dark Knight Academy has undergone changes. With the backing of Beau Magic Academy, we now offer the opportunity for you to pursue the fields you truly desire while remaining within these walls. Whether it be alchemy, forgemastery, or other disciplines, you will have the freedom to choose courses that align with your strengths and aspirations. This is your chance to uncover your true potential and shape your own path."

Thion allowed a moment for the murmurs to settle before continuing.

"From this point forward, your classes will no longer be determined solely by rank," he announced. "Instead, they will be structured based on your chosen fields of study. Whether you are a high-ranked knight or just beginning to grasp your strengths, you will be placed in courses that align with your abilities and aspirations."

"For instance," Thion elaborated, "those with a fire affinity will no longer be grouped with students of significantly different magical specializations. Instead, you will train and study alongside others who share a similar elemental alignment, ensuring proper growth and specialization. Likewise, a student aspiring to master forgemastery will not find themselves trapped in an alchemy class where their skills have no place."

The logic behind the changes became clearer, and whispers of understanding spread through the hall.

"Everything will be balanced according to the path you choose," Thion stated firmly. "This new system ensures that you develop where you are strongest and are not hindered by forced placements. Your potential will be cultivated in the right environment, giving you the best chance to excel in your chosen field."

The weight of his words settled over the students, and for the first time since the announcement of the exam results, there was something other than anxiety in the air—hope.

A student from the crowd hesitantly raised her hand, standing as the Headmaster acknowledged her.

"Sir, haven't we already been doing this for the past few months? We've been taking specialized training with different instructors. What exactly is changing?"

Thion nodded, as if expecting the question. "Yes, I understand why you'd think that. However, what you've been experiencing so far was only an introductory phase—meant to assess your capabilities and determine where you truly belong. Up until now, you have been following a half-day system, where you spend part of your time in general magic classes and the other half training under different instructors. That changes now."

His gaze swept over the students, ensuring he had their full attention. "From this moment on, your entire day will be structured around the courses you've chosen. Instead of splitting your time between general education and training, you will immerse yourself fully in the disciplines that best suit you. Whether it be alchemy, forgemastery, strategy, or combat specialization, your schedule will revolve around honing those skills."

A ripple of murmurs spread through the hall as students processed the information.

"However," Thion continued, raising a hand to silence the chatter, "some courses will still require you to maintain a level of knighthood training. This is the Dark Knight Academy, after all. Even if you are pursuing fields outside of direct combat, understanding the foundation of knighthood remains essential. You will still be expected to meet a basic standard of physical and magical training, no matter your chosen path."

This clarification seemed to settle some of the more skeptical students, while others were still weighing the implications. The shift was significant, but for many, it meant finally being able to focus on what they truly wanted to master.

As Thion finished, he cast one final glance over the students before stepping back. "Mystica will now reveal your exam results and explain what you need to know. Gordon and I have other matters to attend to."

With that, he gave a nod to Mystica and exited the hall, Gordon following behind. The heavy doors shut, leaving a tense silence.

Mystica stepped forward, a sly smile on her face. With a flick of her wrist, a large floating projection appeared, displaying names, new ranks, and scores.

"Alright, little ones," she said, her tone both smooth and teasing. "Let's go over your failures, shall we?"