

ShadowBound 188

Chapter 188: Rising Issues

Mystica's eyes sparkled with a mischievous glint as the smaller screens settled before each student.
"Alright, let's dive into your futures, shall we?"

The floating screens displayed a list of courses and disciplines, each labeled with detailed descriptions:

1. Knight Combat Training

Specializes in swordsmanship, martial arts, mounted combat, and battlefield tactics.

Required: Physical endurance, combat affinity, weapon specialization.

2. Elemental Myst Mastery

Focuses on harnessing elemental powers—fire, water, earth, wind, lightning, and more.

Required: Elemental affinity, myst control, and advanced theory.

3. Strategic Command and Leadership

Prepares for commanding troops, battlefield strategy, and tactical planning.

Required: Analytical skills, communication, and basic combat training.

4. Alchemy and Potion Crafting

Teaches concocting potions, elixirs, and experimental alchemy.

Required: Precision, knowledge of herbs and minerals, and patience.

5. Forgemastery and Enchantment

Focuses on crafting and enchanting weapons, armor, and artifacts.

Required: Basic smithing, myst infusion, and material knowledge.

6. Healing and Support Magic

Centers on medical myst, healing techniques, and support spells.

Required: Myst sensitivity, calm demeanor, and advanced myst control.

7. Beast Transformation and Summoning

Specializes in transforming mystical beasts and summoning familiars.

Required: Beast affinity, mystic bond, and control.

Mystica continued, "These courses are designed to hone your strengths while addressing your weaknesses. You're no longer confined by rank but by the paths you choose and the skills you wish to cultivate."

She took a breath, allowing her words to sink in. "You can choose up to two primary courses and one secondary. Primary courses will consume most of your time, while the secondary will act as a supplementary skill. But choose wisely. This will shape your entire journey here at the academy."

Pausing for effect, she added, "Some courses—like Knight Combat and Strategic Command—will still require you to partake in core knighthood training. After all, we are the Dark Knight Academy."

Mystica gestured, and the screens displayed additional details. "Once you've selected your courses, your schedules will automatically adjust. Morning sessions will be reserved for primary courses, afternoons for secondary, and evenings for knighthood training if applicable."

There was a murmur among the students, a mixture of excitement and apprehension. Mystica leaned in with a conspiratorial smile, "And remember, just because you've chosen a path doesn't mean you're stuck on it forever. Flexibility is the key to survival. If something doesn't work out, adjust, adapt, and overcome. But if you think about slacking—" her playful tone turned steely for a moment, "—there will be consequences."

With a clap of her hands, Mystica's demeanor softened. "So, take a deep breath, explore your options, and set the foundation for the future you want. When you're ready, select your courses on the screen. The path forward is yours to carve."

"And before you start panicking about choosing right here and now, don't worry," Mystica said smoothly. "You have until the end of next week to finalize your course selections. Take your time—no pressure. Well, maybe just a little." She smirked, her teasing tone making some students chuckle nervously.

She crossed her arms, tilting her head slightly. "And for those of you wondering if these magical screens will be hovering in front of your faces all day—no, that's not happening." With a flick of her fingers, a soft glow enveloped the students' left wrists, forming intricate rune marks.

"These marks will let you summon or dismiss your course selection screen whenever you need," Mystica explained. "Just focus on it, and it'll appear. No need to run around looking for an instructor if you forget your options."

The students examined the runes, some tracing the markings curiously.

"That's all from me," Mystica continued. "Once you select your courses, your schedules will be generated automatically, and the rune marks will vanish. No need to rush, but the sooner you decide,

the sooner you can start preparing for what lies ahead." She winked playfully. "Alright, my sweet darlings, you're dismissed~"

With that, the hall filled with movement as students began exiting, making their way back to the dorms, some already discussing their choices, while others still pondered their next steps.

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Far beyond the towering walls of the Dark Knight Academy, past the vast expanse of Zone 12, lay Zone 8—a land renowned for its breathtaking beauty, often regarded as the crown jewel of the Eastern Region. At its heart stood the Tempest Kingdom, the undisputed ruler of the East, its influence stretching across both military and academic domains.

Deep within the royal palace, hidden beyond its grand halls and opulent corridors, existed a chamber known only to the King and Queen, its existence a closely guarded secret shared with only their most trusted guards. Unlike the splendor of the palace, this chamber was stripped of extravagance, its stone walls etched with powerful sigils, ensuring absolute secrecy. At its center stood a long obsidian table, polished to a mirror-like sheen, surrounded by high-backed chairs occupied by some of the most influential figures in the continent's political and academic spheres.

At the head of the table sat Queen Lucy Rature, her piercing green eyes cold and calculating. Despite the lack of a crown, her regal presence was undeniable. Dressed in a fitted royal uniform adorned with lightning insignias, she exuded an air of authority that made even seasoned rulers tread carefully.

To her left, Thion Layenhardt, Headmaster of the Dark Knight Academy, sat in composed silence. His gaze observed the room, fingers interlocked on the table. Beside him, his assistant, Gordon Rvack, wore an easy, righteous smile.

Across from them, representing the Beau Magic Academy, sat its own Headmaster, Elric Vael, a stern man draped in pristine navy-blue robes embroidered with golden sigils. His assistant, Magister Helena Voss, a composed woman with silver-streaked hair, sat beside him, expression unreadable.

The tension in the room was palpable. They had all gathered here under the strict summons of Queen Lucy herself, and none of them knew exactly what she would say next.

She broke the silence first.

"Let's not waste time," Queen Lucy said, her voice cutting through the air like a blade. "We're all aware of the reforms we've implemented at the Beau Magic Academy and the Dark Knight Academy over the last three years. A new, structured system that prioritizes practical combat and specialized training over the old, outdated methods. A system that, I might add, has yielded undeniable results."

Her eyes swept across the table. "But now, the real question remains—" she leaned forward. "What will the other great academies think?"

A heavy silence followed.

Finally, Elric Vael of Beau Magic Academy spoke, his voice measured. "The Noble Knight Academy and the Citadel Magic Academy of the Northern Region have been quite vocal about their... skepticism," he admitted. "They still uphold the traditional methods. They believe the Tempest Kingdom is trying to shift the academic balance of power in its favor."

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Helena Voss nodded. "Many in the Crescent Kingdom's upper circles share this sentiment, given that both the heir to their throne, Percy Granger, and his sister, Sheila Granger, have chosen to pursue their lives in the Dark Knight Academy. A bold move, considering their royal family's ties to the Citadel Magic Academy and the Noble Knight Academy."

Thion Layenhart smirked, leaning back in his seat. "Interesting, isn't it?" His deep voice carried a hint of amusement. "The very heirs of the Crescent Kingdom rejecting their own nation's academy in favor of mine. Perhaps they see the truth—the old ways are dying."

Elric narrowed his eyes. "Or perhaps they have been persuaded."

Gordon Rvack let out a soft chuckle, leaning forward with a polite, almost too-innocent smile. "Oh, come now, Headmaster Vael. Are we really suggesting that a mere academy—no matter how well it trains its students—could seduce two members of a royal family? If the Crescent Kingdom's heirs saw fit to leave their homeland's system, doesn't that simply prove the superiority of our approach?"

Elric's expression hardened, but it was Queen Lucy who responded.

"Spare us the flattery, Gordon," she said bluntly. "The truth is, the Crescent Kingdom and its traditionalist academies will not take this lightly. It's a direct insult to their system. Even if the Granger children made this decision of their own will, the ruling elite will paint this as a calculated move by us to diminish their power."

"Which would not be entirely incorrect," Thion murmured with a faint smirk.

Queen Lucy shot him a sharp look but did not deny it.

Helena Voss exhaled, her tone grave. "If the Crescent Kingdom pushes back, then this will definitely be an issue. The Northern Region has strong allies, including the Eastern Sanctum. If they pressure their affiliated academies to oppose this system, the entire continent's balance of power could be affected."

Elric nodded. "The Citadel Magic Academy is the stronghold of mystic tradition. They have powerful mages, scholars, and—most importantly—influence over the royal court."

"And let's not forget the Noble Knight Academy, where the fiercest warriors of the Northern Region are trained," Helena added. "They are deeply tied to the Crescent Kingdom's military. If they openly denounce the new system, it could create a divide among all academies."

A heavy silence followed.

Queen Lucy, unbothered, rested her chin on her hand. "Let them denounce it," she said coolly. "Their students will fall behind while ours evolve. When wars come—and they will—it won't be their scholars or traditionalists leading the battlefield. It will be our graduates."

Elric frowned. "You speak as if war is inevitable."

Queen Lucy's green eyes darkened. "It is," she said flatly. "The Crescent Kingdom and its allies have held onto academic dominance for too long. They will not accept their heirs choosing a different path. And when people fear losing power, they retaliate."

Thion chuckled, shaking his head. "And here I thought we were only discussing education."

Elric sighed, rubbing his temples. "What do you propose, then?"

Queen Lucy leaned forward, her presence commanding.

"First, we reinforce our support for students who choose our academies. We ensure that neither political pressure nor noble interference forces them back. The Granger children must remain where they are—untouched by outside influence. If the Crescent Kingdom tries to interfere, we make it clear that their education is beyond their control."

Gordon's smirk widened ever so slightly. "And the other academies?"

Queen Lucy's lips curled into a knowing smile. "We let them talk. Let them complain. But we continue to prove that our system is better. When the results speak for themselves, their students will come to us."

Thion grinned. "A battle of tradition versus evolution. I quite like those odds."

Elric and Helena exchanged a look, the weight of this discussion settling over them.

"Then the future of education on this continent has already begun shifting," Helena murmured.

Queen Lucy nodded. "And we will ensure it shifts in the right direction."