

ShadowBound 246

Chapter 246: Recognition 1

Dark Academy, Observation Dome.

One second, the students were arguing in the resting room. The next, they were standing in the middle of the massive dome, blinking at each other like confused deer in headlights.

"...Did we just get kidnapped?" Dylan asked, looking around with wide eyes.

"No, genius. We got summoned," Asher groaned, rubbing his temples like he was trying to massage away a headache from hell.

"Oh, my bad, Arrogant Genius," Dylan shot back, raising an eyebrow. "Didn't realize teleportation was your side gig."

Before Asher could respond with his usual snark, a deep, commanding voice echoed through the dome.

"Welcome back, students."

Heads snapped upward, and there stood Headmaster Thion, his gaze sharp and calculating, like a hawk staring down its next meal. Next to him was Gordon Rvack, wearing that creepy, fake smile of his, and behind them loomed the rest of the professors, with Galen and Magnus slouching at the back like they were too cool to be bothered.

Thion's eyes flicked over Liam and Asher, who still looked like they'd been hit by a train, before moving on to the others. "I trust you've all had enough time to recover?"

Most students nodded, though a few just sighed heavily. Asher cracked his neck dramatically. "Sure, if by 'recover' you mean 'still feel like I got run over by a herd of horses.'" Dylan and Max snickered, but Thion's voice brought them back to attention.

"Good. Now, about the exam you just completed." Thion continued, his voice calm and steady. "There will be no changes in your rankings from three months ago. Therefore, your ranks remain the same until next semester. I know some of you might feel annoyed that you busted your asses in this exam and the past three months for nothing—either to go higher or... maybe even lower. But honestly, your opinions don't interest me. This exam was a team effort of all 100 students. I personally see no reason why there should be any ranking changes."

He paused, letting his words sink in.

"However," he continued, "there are some of you who stood out and deserve recognition and praise. Let me clarify—these names that would be mentioned do not mean they are 'favorites.' They simply did their best, put their lives on the line for their fellow knights—you guys, and went above and beyond. That's all." Thion's eyes swept across the room again. "It has nothing to do with rankings. I'll say that again. Nothing to do with rankings."

"Lady Ember, Sir Regulus, please make it quick so these kids can go and collapse somewhere else," Thion added, turning to sit back in his chair.

Sir Regulus and Lady Ember rose from their seats and strode forward. As they reached the spot where the headmaster had stood moments ago, Regulus casually adjusted his blonde hair, his ever-present, genuine smile in place.

"Hello, students," he greeted, his voice smooth and composed. "Lady Ember and I will be announcing the names of those who stood out during the exam. No need to step forward—your efforts will be displayed on these magical screens as we call your names."

Beside him, Ember stood stiffly, looking like she'd rather be anywhere else. Public speaking wasn't her thing, and the sight of a hundred expectant faces didn't help.

Regulus leaned slightly toward her, whispering through a subtle spell. "Come on, Ember, no need to be shy in front of a bunch of exhausted teenagers. Tell you what—you handle the names, and I'll handle the talking. Sound good?"

Ember gave a small nod, grateful for the deal.

Regulus turned back to the crowd. "Now, there were plenty of you who performed exceptionally well, but since we value sleep and sanity, we're limiting this list to thirteen students." He paused for effect. "First up, we want to acknowledge two students who, despite not being the strongest, showed incredible bravery by risking their lives to protect their peers and civilians." He gestured toward Ember.

Ember cleared her throat. "William and Wesley Owan."

The crowd shifted as the twins stood among them. A glowing magical symbol appeared beneath their feet, casting a soft light that drew everyone's attention.

Regulus nodded approvingly. "You two were incredible. From aiding civilians to making the ultimate sacrifice to protect those around you—your courage deserves recognition. A round of applause, please."

The students clapped, some more enthusiastically than others, while the magical screens replayed scenes of the twins' heroics.

Once the applause faded, Regulus gestured for Ember to continue.

"Next, we have Logan Hepten and Lucian Kellor."

The boys stood together—or rather, next to Chris. As Chris's lackeys, it was an unspoken rule that they stuck to his side. Lucian kept a bit of distance, but Logan, the ultimate bootlicker, was practically glued to Chris's shadow. As their names were called, the magical symbol beneath the Owan twins faded and reappeared beneath Logan and Lucian.

Regulus clasped his hands together. "You two were also remarkable. Your skill and mastery over your respective affinities were impressive—keep up the effort and don't slack off."

The students turned their eyes back to the screens, watching as clips of Logan and Lucian's feats played out in glowing detail.

Next, the names called were Rose—the ginger girl—, Ariana, Max, Charlotte, and Dylan.

Regulus began with Ariana and Rose, speaking on their compassion and selflessness. "The success of this exam wasn't just about fighting," he said, his tone warm but firm. "The mission was to protect civilians, and because of you two, that objective was accomplished. Your quick thinking, healing skills, and ability to manage chaos ensured the survival of many." The magical screens displayed scenes of Ariana and Rosel tending to the wounded, guiding civilians to safety amidst the destruction.

He then turned to Max and Charlotte, his expression thoughtful. "Max," he started, "your skill with weapons is undeniable. Among your peers, you are the finest young weapon master, and your enhancement magic places you in the top ten for a reason." He let the words sink in before adding, "But power isn't just about talent. Your myst reserves need refinement, and your understanding of enhancement magic must deepen. It's often underestimated, seen as simple, but you've taken it far. With more mastery, you'll take it even further."

Max nodded, absorbing the feedback.

Regulus then looked at Charlotte. "I may not be a Beast magic user," he admitted, "but I've worked with enough to understand its strengths and limits." He gave Charlotte an approving nod. "You're ranked third for a reason. Your raw power is undeniable. But you saw your own weakness, didn't you?"

Charlotte crossed her arms and exhaled sharply. "Yeah. My stamina's great, but when I fully transform, my myst drains way too fast. I got so caught up in the fight that I didn't pace myself and burned out before the final battle."

Regulus smiled. "Exactly. You already know what to fix. Now go fix it."

Then came Dylan's turn.

Regulus's smirk widened when he faced the archer. "Ah, Dylan," he drawled, his voice carrying a hint of excitement. "As an archer myself—albeit one with lightning affinity—I have to say, I'm impressed."

Dylan leaned forward, grinning. "Well, I do aim to please."

Regulus chuckled. "To pull off a spell like 'Ravark Estu Meteor'—or as you so dramatically call it, Meteor Shower—at your age? That's no small feat. The precision, the power—"

Just as he was about to launch into a full breakdown of archery techniques, Thion's voice cut through.

"Regulus," the headmaster said flatly. "This is not an archery seminar."

Regulus blinked, then sighed. "Right, right. Moving on."

"Don't worry Ember, handle the rest." He said to Ember through Whisper.

"These following students were what we can describe as great evolving young knights and leaders."