

Living Shadow 109

Chapter 109 Magic Bullet

Damon ignored the relentless buzzing of his pager, his focus unwavering. Sweat dripped from his face, soaking his already-drenched clothes as he stood amidst the oppressive silence of the forest. The pager lay forgotten in his jacket beneath a nearby tree, shaded and safe from the sun's harsh rays.

Pain coursed through his body, radiating from his shattered fingers. His left hand was in ruins, its five fingers broken and charred, the blackened remains of flesh barely clinging to the splintered bone.

His right hand, trembling but steady, was poised in the shape of a gun. At the tips of his fingers, a swirling ball of shadow magic coalesced, thin astral winds flickering around it as it compressed. With a calm, controlled breath, Damon fired.

The recoil was devastating. His flesh seared, and his finger bones cracked audibly under the strain. He gritted his teeth, his sharp breath escaping as he steadied himself, ignoring the dull throb that pulsed through his hands.

The dummy in front of him bore the brunt of his relentless training. It was riddled with scorch marks and puncture holes—hundreds of them. Each was a testament to his determination.

"Almost there... I've almost perfected it," Damon muttered, his voice strained but resolute.

He summoned another sphere of shadow magic, ignoring the fresh surge of agony that accompanied it. He fired again. Then again. Each shot burned away more of his flesh, revealing the stark white of cracked bone beneath.

By now, his distal phalanges were little more than skeletal remains. His intermediate phalanges were no better, scorched and brittle. Only his proximal phalanges, closer to his palms, retained some semblance of flesh, though they too were blackened and blistered.

But Damon didn't stop. After two days of relentless effort, he felt on the verge of a breakthrough. His shadow seemed to whisper encouragement, its otherworldly presence spurring him on as he pushed through the pain.

The genesis of this grueling training was a simple spell—Magic Blast—a basic technique Damon had seen Iris use. It was common knowledge, a rudimentary ability everyone, including Damon, could perform.

The spell required the user to form a ball of their magical attribute and fire it. Its simplicity was its strength, but also its weakness.

'My enemies won't give me the luxury of time to charge up a spell,' Damon had reasoned.

Worse, the spell consumed a fixed 50 mana per shot, a cost Damon couldn't afford with his limited reserves. Through relentless practice, he had reduced its cost to 40 mana, a significant improvement.

But his analytical mind couldn't stop there. Why was Magic Blast always fired from the palms or the surrounding environment? What if it could be compressed and shot from the fingers? It would cost less mana, travel faster, and hit harder.

He had shared his theory with Sylvia, who immediately shot it down, citing the risks and dangers. But Damon's determination was unshakable. He delved deeper into the mechanics, running countless simulations in his mind before committing to a plan.

With his [5x] skill amplifying his mana, Damon crafted a perilous training regimen. The first attempt was catastrophic—the compressed mana burned his fingers before he could even fire.

The second attempt was worse. The recoil obliterated his finger entirely, leaving a bloody stump.

But Damon refused to give up. Bandaging his injuries to staunch the bleeding, he pressed on, testing and refining his technique with each agonizing attempt. Finger by finger, he learned to mitigate the recoil, though at the cost of nearly losing them all.

A saner person would have gone to the healers long ago, seeking aid for their mutilated hands. But Damon had no time for such luxuries. He was working against the clock, driven by an unrelenting urgency.

Yet, his current agony was only part of the danger. The true peril lay ahead—mastering the Omnidirectional Gear, the deadliest aspect of his training.

For now, he focused on perfecting his spell. His pain, the buzzing pager, and the oppressive heat were all secondary. The only thing that mattered was the task at hand.

'How many times did I almost die?'

Damon mentally tallied the number: 116. That was how many near-death experiences he had endured during his grueling training to master the Omnidirectional Gear.

Swinging through trees at extreme speeds had become a gauntlet of pain. He crashed into rocks, smashed into tree trunks, and was skewered by branches, each collision leaving his body broken and bloodied. His bones were shattered repeatedly, his skin shredded to ribbons. Holes in his body marked where branches had pierced through, and yet he pushed forward.

The most dangerous maneuvers were those where he soared above the tree line, racing through the air at blinding speeds, only to yank himself back down with the same intensity. More than once, he fell from the heights, his momentum sending him hurtling into the unforgiving forest floor below.

By the time the sun had set on his first day of training, Damon had lost so much blood that he was on the brink of passing out. Necrosis began to creep into his wounds, his HP a mere 2/50. He should have stopped, should have given up, but instead, he staggered back toward the academy, woozy and delirious. He knew if he didn't get back he would truly die alone in the woods

Somehow, he made it back.

When he arrived, drenched in blood and barely standing, his appearance sent shockwaves through the academy. Before he collapsed, someone caught him. When he woke, Damon found himself in the healer's ward, his body fully restored as though nothing had happened.

Leona, Sylvia, Evangeline, Xander, and even Professor Kael were waiting for him, demanding explanations.

"It was just training," Damon had said with a straight face.

The response had not gone over well.

"I've never seen a group of people unite in their collective hatred for my methods," Damon muttered, recalling how they had all chewed him out for his recklessness.

But their protests didn't stop him. He continued, enduring what felt like an eternity of punishment and progress.

Now, standing under the forest canopy, his determination bore fruit. He sent the last of his mana into his ruined fingers, forming the familiar gun-like gesture. With a steady breath, he fired.

For the first time, there was no pain. No recoil.

Damon froze, staring at his hand in disbelief. Could it be that his fingers were so damaged that he simply couldn't feel anymore?

Then the notification came.

[Ding]

[You have created the spell: Magic Bullet.]

[Mastery: 4%. @%^#^#&?????]

[You have yet to unlock the Mastery mechanic.]

[Unable to track progress.]

A slow smile crept across Damon's sweaty face. He had done it. After all the pain and near-death experiences, he had created something entirely new.

The journey wasn't over—far from it. But this was a victory, however small, and it meant he was one step closer to the power he sought.

Although he was curious about the notifications.