

Living Shadow 120

Chapter 120 Mid-semester Evaluation

For the next two days, Damon allowed himself to take things slow. He rested his weary body and mind, finally enjoying a brief reprieve from the chaos that had consumed his life. He studied at his leisure, delving deeper into his magic texts and refining his knowledge.

During breaks, he trained Iris, honing her skills in the basics of magic blasts and teaching her archery, hunting techniques, and even a bit of pickpocketing—though he dubbed it "stealth training" to avoid the moral implications.

"It's not like I'm raising her into a criminal or anything," he mused aloud. "Awareness of your surroundings is a survival skill."

Lilith Astranova remained under house arrest, leaving Damon far more relaxed than usual. He had devoured three infant wendigos, channeling all the attribute points he gained into his mana pool. As a result, he began dabbling in barrier magic and body reinforcement magic.

Life felt oddly calm, but the undercurrent of tension was unavoidable. The mid-semester evaluation loomed on the horizon, keeping everyone on edge. Even with his traps and the forest terrain, Damon couldn't shake the feeling that the academy had something unexpected in store.

The academy's reputation for brutal, Spartan-like tests was well-earned. Those who had survived the life-and-death gauntlet of the entrance exam knew that nothing was off the table. While the quarter-semester evaluation had been a mere aptitude test, this was shaping up to be something far more dangerous—a real battle.

"I wonder if this is one of those exams where we're allowed to kill each other..." Damon muttered to himself.

He shook his head, dismissing the thought.

"Unlikely," he added. Most first-years didn't face life-threatening situations until the end-of-semester evaluations or, in some cases, the second year itself.

"Still, I wouldn't put it past them," he murmured.

He had seen a draft of the evaluation in the student council office, but it wasn't finalized. There was always the chance for last-minute changes, especially when it came to something as unpredictable as the academy's tests.

Damon slipped into the combat uniform issued for the exam.

The attire resembled military gear: a durable, magic-absorbent chest plate, a fitted inner layer, a jacket, and pants paired with sturdy boots. Additional knee and elbow guards added protection, and a hood could be used in extreme weather. The uniform was cleverly designed to accommodate additional armor, a hallmark of craftsmanship from the magical continent.

Securing his usual weapons beneath the jacket, Damon took a deep breath.

'I was right,' he thought grimly. His shadow only leveled up when it consumed the specific type of soul listed in its requirements.

As for Shadow Hunger, devouring regular monsters had no noticeable effect.

His stomach growled ominously, his shadows shifting erratically around him as if mirroring his frustration.

"At least killing monsters gives me attribute points," he muttered, pouring those points into mana to bolster his reserves.

Still, the gnawing sensation of Shadow Hunger was relentless. He bit his lip, a grim thought forming in his mind.

'I need a long-term solution for this. If I keep growing stronger and needing to feed more, I might as well devour the entire world...'

Although he knew such an outcome was absurd, Damon couldn't help but feel that it wasn't entirely impossible. At some point, the hunger would consume him—or worse, someone would catch on and put an end to him first.

His stomach growled again, louder this time.

He groaned, running a hand through his hair. He was growing accustomed to managing Shadow Hunger at a high level, but it was a dangerous game. In the past, such intense hunger would have left him blacking out, his shadows threatening to take full control.

Now, he was treading a fine line, and he knew it.

Damon opened his system panel, scanning the information displayed before him.

[HP: 50/50]

[Mana: 119/119]

[Strength: 9]

[Agility: 17]

[Speed: 35]

[Endurance: 10]

[Class: —]

[Shadow: 40]

[Shadow Hunger Levels: 60%]

[Shadow Level: 2]

[Condition: Shadow Hungry]

[Attributes: Umbra]

[Skills:]

[5x] [Remorseless] [Shadow Perception] [Water Celebration]

[Locked]

His eyes drifted to the shadow section.

[Shadow Level: 2]

Your Shadow Level reflects your control and power over your shadow. You can level up by feeding it and completing specific challenges or quests, which will grant you stat points to enhance HP, mana, and other attributes.

Level Up Requirements:

Souls Consumed: [4/5]

"Hmmm... just one more to level up," Damon murmured, tapping his chin.

Killing Marcus had been on his mind for a while. He needed the stats boost from Shadow Hunger to increase his odds of winning. Everything was riding on this mid-semester evaluation.

Professor Kael had gone out of his way to remind Damon of his "place" over the past few days, taunting him and promising to personally ensure Damon was kicked out of the academy when he inevitably failed.

'Don't go deciding my possibilities just yet, Kael... I've got a few words for you when I win,' Damon thought, his resolve solidifying.

He closed his system panel, standing up.

"No doubt. No hesitation. Just focus," he muttered to himself as he opened the door.

The sight of his fellow students greeted him immediately. They were all geared up, clad in their combat uniforms, standing in line to receive bracelets that looked like artifacts. Wide, white bands with inscribed runes covered their surfaces, resembling wristwatches with glowing displays.

Damon joined the line, waiting his turn before strapping on the cold, rune-covered bracelet. It hummed faintly against his wrist, a small but constant reminder of the academy's power.

He glanced around, spotting Leona and the usual gang approaching.

Xander, as always, carried himself with the perfect air of a noble. His eyes, however, betrayed the same irritation he always held for Damon.

The feeling was mutual.

They exchanged polite greetings and brief small talk before their attention was drawn to the professors standing at the forefront. Professor Kael, his cold gaze sharper than ever, stood alongside several others, including Professor Chrome.

Kael's voice cut through the murmuring crowd like a blade.

"First-year students. Your mid-semester evaluation is today, as you are all aware. However, the details of your evaluation have not been disclosed until now."

He paused, his steely gaze scanning the sea of students.

"For years, the goddess races have fought against the demon races. Long before any of you were born, we were all born into this ancient conflict. Although there is a truce now, we all know it is only temporary."

His words settled heavily over the students, who stood silent and still.

"That is why this academy exists: to raise the next generation of defenders for the goddess races in this war against the demons. And so, we must mold you into powerful warriors, tempered in the trials of fire. To that end, your mid-semester evaluation will be conducted in an open environment. Unlike the quarter-semester evaluation, which measured your aptitude, this test will assess your battle capabilities to their fullest."

Kael let his words hang in the air for a moment, watching as students absorbed their meaning.

"You are to set out for the venue immediately," he added.

The students wore expressions ranging from determination to dread. The academy's reputation for merciless challenges was well known, and many had already experienced the life-and-death stakes of the entrance exams.

Kael's next words, however, sent a chill through the group.

"The exam will take place in the Evil Forest."

Gasps and murmurs rippled through the students, and a few went completely pale. The Evil Forest was infamous—a place teeming with monsters, dangers, and a suffocating aura that made even seasoned adventurers hesitant to enter.

Damon clenched his fists, feeling the tension in the air. His eyes flickered with resolve.

'No turning back now,' he thought grimly.