

## Living Shadow 122

### Chapter 122 Rules Of Engagement

Damon suppressed a cold smile when he heard Kael's words.

'They kept the most critical rule simple—anything goes if it's to win. Burning the forest might be suicidal, but I have an ace up my sleeve.' His thoughts wandered to his skill, [Water Celebration], a unique ability that ensured he couldn't drown in water. It might come in handy.

Murmurs spread like wildfire among the students as the implications of the rules began to sink in.

"Professor, if we can't use magical artifacts, how are we supposed to defeat a monster?" one student asked, desperation creeping into his voice.

Kael raised his hand, silencing the crowd.

"Enough. Let me explain the situation. Do not interrupt," he said, his tone cold and commanding.

His gaze swept over the group as he continued. "The rules of engagement are simple."

Kael pointed to the bracelets on their wrists.

"These bracelets serve multiple purposes. Most importantly, they store your total points. Destroying someone's bracelet will transfer their points to you. Additionally, the bracelet contains a teleportation function that will activate if you surrender or if the bracelet is destroyed. This will remove you from the exam immediately."

Damon's cold eyes narrowed. The clause about destroying the bracelets stood out to him.

'So, they're pitting us against each other,' he thought, his lips curling slightly.

Kael gestured toward the forest ahead.

"Within the Evil Forest, there are crystals hidden. Each crystal holds a specific point value. Gold crystals, the rarest, are worth 1,000 points. On average, crystals are worth 50 points."

The students' murmurs grew louder.

Kael raised his voice to drown them out.

"To pass, you must obtain 3,000 points or more. Anything less counts as a failure. There are two main ways to earn points: finding crystals or defeating automata guarding specific areas. Automata are mechanical constructs, each with a point base."

The murmuring turned into outright chatter.

"Professor, how powerful are the automata?"

"Will there be any monsters in the forest?"

Kael raised his hand again, his expression stern.

"Enough! You are expected to figure out the specifics yourselves. However, I can tell you this much—the automata become more powerful the deeper you go into the forest. Similarly, the points available increase. Forming a party might be your best option if you plan to explore the inner regions."

He glanced at them with his usual cold expression, the fear in their eyes was evident.

"You can rest assured, there will be no monsters in the buffer zone created for the evaluation...however the automata will be more powerful than each individual student."

Damon narrowed his eyes.

'They're setting us up. First, they hint at taking each other's points, then suggest working together. There won't be enough points for everyone to pass; that much is obvious.'

The rules were deceptive, but Damon noticed they aligned with his expectations, save for the addition of automata.

Kael glanced toward one of the professors standing behind him, signaling him with a nod.

"Now, choose your weapons," Kael announced.

Professor Chrome stepped forward, raising his hand as a surge of magic filled the air. "[Shift]," he intoned.

The space around them distorted, and suddenly, a section of the academy's armory appeared before them.

Damon's eyes widened slightly in awe. The armory was supposed to be miles away, yet Professor Chrome had casually bridged the distance with his spell. The sheer power of someone in a higher-class advancement was incredible.

"Select your weapons," Chrome instructed, stepping aside.

The students hesitated briefly before entering the space. Damon followed, his sharp gaze scanning the array of weapons before him.

For the next few minutes, Damon deliberated on which weapon to choose but ultimately settled on a simple quiver of arrows. He had already armed himself extensively before arriving and didn't want to resort to using his cursed or hollow-tipped arrows prematurely.

Those were reserved for emergencies. Earlier, he had discreetly retrieved the rest of his arrows from Marcus's room, ensuring there were no traces of his actions.

His head felt heavy with hunger, but that very hunger granted him a certain clarity. The exam would last until midnight, which he believed he could endure. However, the risk of going ravenous by then loomed ominously.

'If I let it climb to 80%, I could overpower most of them,' he thought, but immediately dismissed the idea.

It was a reckless gamble. At that level, his strength would increase significantly, but his control would waver—a risk he wasn't willing to take.

Around him, the other students had armed themselves. Leona chose a massive mace adorned with vicious spikes. She handled the weapon with ease, showcasing her brute strength.

'I'm definitely not giving her the chance to swing that at me,' Damon thought grimly. One hit from that thing, and he'd be out of the exam—or worse.

Evangeline carried a long sword strapped to her waist, her movements calm and measured, a reflection of her disciplined demeanor.

Sylvia, true to her elven heritage, selected a bow and quiver of arrows, complemented by twin curved blades secured at her hips. Aside from Damon, she appeared to be the most heavily armed.

Then there was Xander, who hefted a massive broadsword onto his back. The weight of the blade seemed inconsequential to him, thanks to his ability to manipulate gravity. As usual, Xander shot Damon a glare filled with disdain.

"Tch. Do you think you can win with just a quiver, you mongrel?" he sneered.

Damon sighed, fully aware of why Xander might underestimate him. Most of Damon's weapons were concealed beneath his uniform, leaving only the quiver visible.

Xander's eyes narrowed suspiciously. "What dirty tricks are you plotting?"

Damon shrugged nonchalantly. "Who knows?" he replied, turning to walk away.

"Wait, hold on," Sylvia called out, stepping forward. She glanced between Damon and Xander, her expression calm but firm.

"The evaluation will be much harder this time, but since the rules allow it, we should form parties. No, we have to form parties," she said decisively.

Damon's eyes flickered with interest. Everything was falling into place. Sylvia, ever perceptive, had seen through the professors' intentions.