

Living Shadow 125

Chapter 125 Fight Or Flight

The automata charged at them. Despite its imposing form and lifelike design, it lacked the feral instincts of a true monster.

Xander moved first, stepping forward with his heavy sword raised to intercept its claws. From the rear, Damon and Sylvia unleashed a barrage of arrows and magical projectiles. The automata staggered under the combined assault, its movements faltering as Sylvia's magic disrupted its internal mechanisms.

Before it could recover, Leona lunged forward, her mace swinging in a brutal arc that shattered its head with a deafening crunch.

The fight was over in seconds.

Xander frowned, staring at the lifeless automata on the ground....if it was even alive to being with.

"That was too easy. I expected more of a challenge."

Leona smirked, resting her mace on her shoulder. "Weak, but hey, I got 10 points."

Damon, standing a few paces back, nodded.

"We're still on the outskirts. Things will get harder the deeper we go. But..."

He paused, glancing around.

"Since there's an automata so close, there should be a crystal hidden nearby. Spread out and look for it."

He closed his eyes, activating his shadow perception. The faint trace of a crystal's shadow led him to a peculiar plant growing in the shade. Its blue leaves shimmered faintly, while yellow flowers swayed gently, emitting soft, almost imperceptible whispers.

"There," Damon said, pointing.

Evangeline followed his gaze, frowning. "Are you sure?"

Damon's tone was icy. "Positive."

Leona took a step forward, eager to claim the prize, but Sylvia darted in and tackled her to the ground.

"Wait! That's Whisper Weed!" Sylvia exclaimed. "You can't just approach it."

Damon raised an eyebrow, unfamiliar with the plant's nature but recalling its nauseating effects from personal experience.

Sylvia stood, brushing off the dark soil clinging to her clothes.

"It's a dangerous flora from another death zone—the Whispering Forest. That place is even less explored than the Evil Forest because it's surrounded by other danger zones. And the closest area anyone has managed to map out has been taken over by demons."

Evangeline nodded thoughtfully.

"It's like the Ashen Forest in Iorvas. The difference is, the monsters there don't leave the region to attack human settlements."

Xander crossed his arms. "The Whispering Forest... isn't that where the Path of Kings is? The ancient ruins of—"

"Does it really matter?" Damon interrupted sharply, clearly uninterested in Xander's attempt to impress Evangeline.

"This world has too many ruins and dungeons to count. We don't have time for idle chatter."

Without hesitation, Damon conjured a blast of magic and hurled it at the Whisper Weed. The impact obliterated the plant, revealing a faintly glowing crystal within the remains.

Damon approached, picking up the crystal. The moment it touched his hand, it dissolved into a spark of light, and his safety bracelet buzzed. He glanced at it—10 points added to his total.

He stared at the now-empty spot where the Whisper Weed had grown, a thoughtful expression on his face.

'If gaining points means fighting automata and destroying dangerous flora, won't we run out of mana before the day ends?'

His gaze flicked to the others.

'Conserving my mana is going to be crucial.'

"Let's move," he said curtly.

Sylvia nodded, and the group pressed on.

Navigating the outer region was relatively easy. The automata they encountered were simplistic, relying solely on brute force without any semblance of magical abilities or advanced programming.

Damon led the way, methodically locating and collecting points as they moved. He avoided lingering in the outer region; the real objective lay deeper within the forest. The inner region promised higher rewards, but it also came with greater risks.

Along the way, Damon checked the traps he had previously rigged—areas designed to ignite in flames if triggered. To his relief, they remained untouched.

'The real challenge will begin once the automata are defeated and the points collected aren't enough,' he thought grimly.

'By then, everyone will be accustomed to the terrain. Teams will start to fracture, and alliances will crumble. Even my so-called party might turn on me. If that happens, I'll need to strike first.'

His thoughts were interrupted by a flicker of movement in his shadow perception. A large group was approaching. He frowned as he counted.

"We've got... huh, wait... 20—no, make that 30 automata incoming."

He turned to Sylvia. "So, what's the plan? Fight or flight?"

Sylvia's brows furrowed. "How strong are they?"

"From what I can sense," Damon replied, "about 25 points each for most of them. But there are at least five worth 50 points."

Sylvia gritted her teeth, pulling out an arrow. "We fight."

Damon held back a sigh. 'Let's hope I live long enough to execute my plan.'

He notched an arrow and prepared for the fight, glancing briefly at his teammates. They were some of the top students in the class. What could possibly go wrong?

The automata that emerged from the trees were unlike the ones they had encountered earlier. These resembled wolves, their sleek metallic bodies glowing with elemental runes. Some bore fire attributes, while others radiated wind energy.

'Fire and wind... a dangerous combination in a forest filled with lots of wood,' Damon thought, grimacing.

His gaze shifted to the ground.

'Good thing I hid explosives and set up a makeshift pipeline beneath the forest floor.'

Sylvia's grey eyes were steely with determination as she called out orders.

"Long-range attacks first! Don't let them swarm us. Evangeline, take out the big ones with light magic!"

Evangeline raised her hands, summoning a torrent of light magic that blasted toward the lead automata. The wolf-like creature roared as the magic hit, but instead of crumpling under the attack, the energy dispersed harmlessly across its shimmering body.

Evangeline's eyes widened in shock.

"They're magic-resistant! We'll need to combine physical attacks with magic to break through!"

Sylvia's expression hardened.

"Then we slow them down. Aim for the trees—create obstacles!"

Damon's fingers tightened on his bowstring as he took aim. The battle was about to escalate, and the stakes had just been raised.