

## Living Shadow 131

### Chapter 131 My Prey

Damon felt himself black out momentarily before regaining control. As he steadied himself, his Shadow Perception expanded, spreading across a vast area under the influence of the now-starved Shadow Hunger. The sensation was overwhelming yet familiar, a testament to his relentless training.

Through the shadows, Damon could sense everything—the ongoing skirmishes down the hill, where students fought tooth and nail to destroy the lesser automata. He felt the faint light of eliminations as more students fell. Beyond them, he perceived the dense canopy of the forest, an intricate web of darkness and life that appeared to him in fragmented images.

Gripping his head, Damon forced himself to focus on the threat before him—the great automata. Its presence was oppressive, but the flood of information from his perception didn't paralyze him. If anything, it sharpened his resolve.

Behind him, his companions shifted nervously under the automata's unrelenting gaze. The tension was palpable.

Evangeline's expression remained calm and composed. Sylvia glanced her way and nodded, her voice steady but firm.

"As we discussed—it has magic resistance, so you'll need to mix in physical attacks."

Evangeline turned to the others. "Everyone, get into formation!"

Sylvia expected Damon to nod or acknowledge her instructions, but instead, he just stood there. His eyes widened as though witnessing something terrifying. Slowly, he turned his gaze toward her, a shadowy aura clinging to his frame. His expression changed—it was dark, primal, and almost ravenous.

Sylvia narrowed her eyes, uneasy. She'd only seen Damon wear that expression once before, and it had left a brief impression.

"Is he alright?" she muttered under her breath.

But there was no time to investigate further.

The automata wasted no time, swinging its massive sword with a devastating arc. Xander, Leona, and the front-line fighters from Faram and Natch's groups rushed forward, their weapons and magic meeting the automata's blade head-on.

The impact was catastrophic. The first student to make contact disappeared into a burst of sparks, eliminated instantly. The force of the strike sent others flying, colliding with one another as they struggled to maintain their footing.

The automata absorbed the points, and its aura intensified, growing visibly stronger.

Sylvia clenched her fists, her voice tinged with urgency.

"This is bad... if it eliminates too many, it'll reach the strength of the first rank. If that happens, we'll have no chance!"

"Mid-range fighters, support the front line!" Evangeline shouted, taking charge.

She lifted her blade, channeling her energy. [Radiant Blade] illuminated the battlefield as she swung it, unleashing a destructive arc of light. Natch followed up with a fiery beam, while Faram conjured a massive spike of earth aimed at the automata's core.

The great automata raised its massive shield, deflecting the magical barrage with a resounding clang. Evangeline didn't relent, leaping onto the shield and climbing its surface in an attempt to reach its head. Her sword glimmered with radiant energy as she closed in.

The automata shifted, its sword arm moving to swat her away, but Xander intercepted the strike, locking blades with the mechanical behemoth. Meanwhile, Leona charged forward, slamming her electrified mace into its knee joint. Arcs of lightning danced across its metallic surface as the automata faltered for a moment.

But it retaliated swiftly. With a powerful shove, it slammed its shield forward, striking Evangeline and sending her crashing into a tree with a sickening crunch.

Natch seized the opportunity, unleashing a fiery point-blank attack with his axe. Sparks flew as the automata staggered slightly, its armor scorched and dented. The other fighters unleashed a relentless barrage of magical attacks, desperate to bring it down.

The automata emitted a bizarre sizzling sound before retaliating with a surge of lightning magic. A devastating wave of electricity rippled outward, stunning the fighters and hurling them back with brutal force.

Damon remained still, his breathing ragged as the chaotic scene unfolded around him. His shadow whispered to him, a relentless hunger gnawing at the edges of his mind.

Sylvia paled as the frontline fighters faltered, her heart sinking with the realization that if they didn't re-engage in close-range combat, they would lose.

The great automata slammed its massive foot down onto an unfortunate elf boy from Faram's party, instantly eliminating him from the exam in a flash of sparks.

Faram gritted his teeth, his voice trembling with suppressed frustration.

"Melos..."

The automata shifted its focus to Evangeline, who was already struggling to her feet. It raised its shield, deflecting the long-distance attacks from the support fighters positioned in the rear.

Leona rushed forward, lightning crackling across her storm-magic enhanced mace. Her innate resistance to lightning made her the best candidate for close combat. With a roar, she swung her weapon at the automata, but it was faster. The metallic giant blocked her strike with its sword, sparks flying as the two clashed.

The automata retaliated with another area-of-effect stun attack, a burst of electricity that rippled through the battlefield. The jolt knocked Leona back, disorienting the others and preventing them from rising. Evangeline, still regaining her footing, raised her sword to block as the automata's blade swung toward her. Though her blade absorbed the brunt of the attack, the force pushed her several paces back.

Before she could recover, the automata's fist came down like a hammer, slamming her into the ground with a resounding thud. Evangeline coughed, her vision swimming as she struggled to move.

The automata raised its massive sword, aiming to eliminate her. Her eyes widened in horror as the blade descended. At the last moment, a familiar white figure leapt into the fray, creating a hastily conjured barrier between her and the automata's attack.

The automata's sword met the barrier with a deafening crash, shattering it instantly and sending both Evangeline and her rescuer rolling across the ground.

As the automata raised its shield to crush them, Sylvia closed her eyes, bracing for the inevitable. But the impact never came. Instead, she heard the dull sound of metal meeting flesh.

Opening her eyes, she was stunned to see a dark-haired figure—Damon—standing between the automata and the fallen pair. With his bare hands, he held the massive shield at bay.

His voice was low, almost a growl, but she caught the words.

"My prey..."

Damon pushed the automata back with sheer physical strength. The shadows at his feet deepened, writhing like living things. He struck the automata's shield with a single punch, leaving a massive dent in the enchanted metal.

Sylvia's breath hitched.

"No way... how does he have that much power?"

She felt no trace of magic emanating from him, only raw, overwhelming physical force. It was as if he were the automata's natural enemy, unaffected by its magic resistance. Damon's dark eyes flicked toward them briefly, burning with an intensity she had never seen before.

Without hesitation, Damon launched himself forward. His second punch forced the automata back several steps, the earth beneath its feet cracking from the impact.

The opening gave the others a chance to recover from the stun. Fighters scrambled to their feet, gripping their weapons and preparing to re-engage.

But Damon didn't wait. With shadows swirling around his feet, he charged straight at the automata, ramming his body into its chest with the force of a battering ram. The automata staggered, its mechanical form groaning under the relentless assault.