

Living Shadow 132

Chapter 132 Never From An Enemy

It took Damon a moment to regain control of himself. The hunger of his shadow, now at 80%, gnawed at him, pulling his attention to the glow of souls. Among them, Evangeline and Sylvia's souls shone the brightest, practically begging to be devoured.

As the automata barreled toward them, Damon's shadow surged uncontrollably. For a split second, it consumed him, and when he came to, he found himself charging—not at the automata—but at the girls. At the last moment, he veered off course, redirecting his momentum to block the automata's massive attack instead.

He braced himself, expecting to be sent flying, but to his surprise, the boost from his shadow's hunger placed him on par with the three-meter-tall metal knight. The collision didn't throw him back—instead, it merely pushed him slightly as he dug his feet into the ground.

He didn't need to look back to see their expressions. His shadow perception painted a vivid picture of their glowing souls behind him. His eyes throbbed with an insatiable hunger, and a low, guttural whisper escaped his lips.

"My prey..."

Damon clenched his fists. He needed to end this quickly—90% hunger was a dangerous threshold, one he had crossed before, and it had nearly consumed him entirely. Back then, he had hesitated, torn between his doubts and his need to feed. Now, he understood that hesitation was a luxury he couldn't afford. He had learned to weaponize his hunger, pushing to 80% for the boost it provided while remaining in control.

He shoved the automata back, its massive frame groaning under the force.

'Alright, buddy, let's work together. Fifty-fifty—your brawn, my brain. That way, we eat sooner.'

He felt an eerie acceptance from his shadow, like a whispered agreement in his own voice.

"Fooooood..."

Pulling out his daggers, Damon launched himself at the automata. At the same time, Xander, Leona, and Faram crashed into its back, distracting it.

Evangeline, her sword of light in hand, took position beside Damon. Sylvia, standing just behind, notched a glowing lunar arrow into her bowstring.

The automata raised its sword arm, unleashing a wave of lightning that swept across the battlefield. Xander stepped forward, conjuring a gravity barrier to absorb the brunt of the attack.

"That won't work this time!" he roared.

Leona slammed her mace into the ground, creating a crackling sheet of ice and lightning that surged toward the automata's legs. Before the electricity could reach, the automata planted its shield firmly into the ground, grounding the voltage.

Evangeline darted forward, her blade of light slashing across the automata's visor, sending a cascade of sparks flying. The automata reached for her, but Damon kicked her aside, throwing her clear of danger. He vaulted upward, burying both daggers into the automata's remaining eye.

If the automata had been a living creature, it would have been blinded. Instead, it proved that the visors weren't essential for sight—it had another means of perceiving its surroundings.

Faram conjured a wall of earth spikes, shoving it forward with a gesture. His gaze flicked to Damon, his expression betraying disbelief.

'Since when was he this powerful...?'

Xander seized the opportunity, scaling the wall of spikes to reach the automata's head.

"You may resist magic, but you're not immune!" he shouted, infusing his sword with gravity magic. With a powerful swing, he slammed the blade down on its head, the impact forcing the automata to stagger with a dull metallic clang.

The automata's shield, now heavily damaged, clattered to the ground as it discarded the useless weight. A grinding sound echoed as the center of its chest opened, revealing a glowing, pulsing core.

"That's its core," Sylvia called out, her voice urgent. "We need to destroy it to win!"

Damon's eyes narrowed. "Why reveal its core now...?"

The answer became clear in an instant. The core glowed brighter, crackling with electricity before releasing a beam of energy. The blast was instantaneous, striking three students and eliminating them from the exam in a burst of light.

Sylvia clenched her teeth, her knuckles white around her bow.

"We need to destroy the core—now!"

The team didn't hesitate, charging at the automata with renewed determination. But as they approached, the massive machine began shedding parts of its armor. Stripped of its bulky defenses, it exchanged durability for speed, dashing forward with alarming agility.

It swung its sword down at Faram, who hastily conjured an earthen shield. The barrier held, but only just. Right before the automata could eliminate him, Natch unleashed a chain of fire magic, forcing the machine back with an explosion of heat and flames.

Evangeline took advantage of the opening, darting forward to slash at the automata's knees with her light-infused sword. Sparks flew as her blade severed critical wires.

"It may be faster now," she shouted, "but its defenses are weaker!"

Damon followed up, slashing at the automata's elbow. His daggers cut through thick tubes, causing its sword arm to falter and drop slightly.

Sylvia, standing at the rear, began charging an arrow of lunar magic. Her bow glowed with a pale, ethereal light as she prepared to fire.

Meanwhile, Leona and Xander struck together, their heavy weapons smashing into the automata's waist. The combined force caused its lower frame to buckle.

"This is what you get for eliminating so many people!" Xander snarled.

The automata collapsed to its knees, its movements sluggish and erratic. Sylvia's arrow, now fully charged with radiant energy, glowed like a miniature star. She released it, the arrow streaking through the air in a blinding arc of white light. It struck the automata's exposed core with unerring precision, piercing through its center and shattering it.

The automata froze, its red glow dimming as its body fell with a metallic thud.

Natch, panting heavily, stood up with a grin. "We won... we actually beat it! Ha!"

He glanced around at the others. Most of them were battered and bruised, except for Damon, who stood eerily untouched, his expression unreadable.

Sylvia approached the now disabled barrier, her gaze fixed on the golden crystal inside. She carefully reached for it, her fingers trembling slightly from adrenaline.

"We did it," she said softly, glancing at Damon with a triumphant smile.

He didn't respond, his dark eyes locked on her.

As her hand closed around the crystal, the points it contained transferred to her bracelet, the bar on her display shooting upward. She turned back to face the group, her victory evident.

But before she could speak, she froze. A cold, sharp pain bloomed in her stomach. She gasped, looking down to see the glint of Damon's dagger buried deep in her abdomen.

Her wide, tear-filled eyes met his. His gaze was cold, devoid of emotion, but beneath the surface, a primal hunger burned.

"W...why..." she whispered, her voice trembling.

Damon tilted his head slightly, his expression as calm as his words were cutting.

"You're so naive, Sylvia. You're smart—I'll give you that much. You could even be considered a walking encyclopedia. But knowing things and having wisdom are not the same. You can read a thousand books, but that won't change the fact that, at your core, you're nothing more than a sheltered little princess who doesn't understand how the world works."

Sylvia coughed, her tears falling freely as his words tore into her just as deeply as his blade. Her legs weakened, but he leaned in, speaking softly, his voice a knife of its own.

"I didn't need you to save me from my solitude."

Her body began to dissolve into a cascade of white sparks, her points flowing into Damon's bracelet. The bar on his display surged higher, marking his victory.

He turned to face the others, who stood frozen, their expressions a mixture of shock, disbelief, and horror. The silence was deafening, the weight of his actions sinking in as the battlefield grew eerily still.