

Living Shadow 48

Chapter 48 Shadow's Choice

Damon counted the zeni in his hand—12,000 from the day's pickpocketing spree. The weight of the coins brought back memories he'd rather forget. Back in the capital, child pickpockets had to pay protection money to local gangs.

To put it simply, most of your loot went straight to the gang. Refuse to pay, and you'd disappear without a trace.

'This world isn't fair to the weak,' he thought bitterly.

He stuffed the money into the bag holding his academy uniform, dividing the spoils as agreed. Damon kept 70% of the earnings, giving Carls 10% for leading him to the vendors and 20% as his share of the pickpocketing profits. They made sure to dispose of the pouches and any incriminating evidence before continuing.

"Alright, show me where I can get ore for cheap," Damon said flatly.

Carls grinned mischievously.

"Heh, I know just the place. But it's a bit unconventional, and it'll depend on how good your eye is."

Damon raised an eyebrow, his expression wary.

"And where would that be?"

Carls brushed his brown hair aside and smirked.

"Follow me."

Damon hesitated for a moment, his eyes flicking to his shadow, which remained still. Its silence was reassuring, but he still muttered under his breath,

"Keep an eye out for tricks."

The shadow stirred slightly, acknowledging his command. Satisfied, Damon followed Carls through the winding streets until they arrived at an old, dusty shop.

The place reeked of booze and rocks, the heavy scent of sweat hanging in the air. It was exactly what Damon expected—miners sold their pilfered finds here, rocks that might contain valuable ore. Buyers could sift through the pile, pay for a piece, and hope they struck gold—or, more likely, lose their money.

It was gambling in its purest form. Rare success stories kept the hopeful coming back, even though most people left empty-handed.

Damon scanned the shop's interior, his expression flat. "Are you serious?"

Carls smiled cheekily. "Dead serious."

Damon crossed his arms, unimpressed.

"I don't gamble unless I have more than an 80% chance of winning."

Carls chuckled.

"Well, you're in luck. This isn't gambling—it's a test of skill. If you've got a sharp eye, you can walk away with something valuable. Most of these rocks come from a magi-ore mine. I've seen people make a killing here."

Damon's eyes narrowed. "And I'm sure you've seen plenty of people lose their shirts, too."

Carls shrugged, smirking.

"Only the idiots who don't know when to quit."

Damon turned on his heel, ready to leave. "Not worth it," he muttered.

"Wait, wait!" Carls grinned slyly. "Did I mention it's only three zeni per piece?"

Damon paused mid-step, his eyes flickering with interest.

"You should've said so earlier," he said, turning back toward the shop.

Damon stepped into the dusty shop, Carls trailing close behind. The air was heavy with the stench of sweat, dirt, and booze. Approaching the counter, Damon locked eyes with the scruffy man behind it, who seemed barely awake.

"I want to try my hand," Damon said evenly.

The man groaned, his voice slurred.

"Three zeni per piece. Don't try anything shady, or else. Pay after you pick. We break the rocks open after you pay. Got that? Now scram."

Damon nodded, understanding the strategy. Once someone picked their rocks and brought them to the counter, there were no take-backs—whatever they chose, they had to pay for, regardless of whether it contained treasure or worthless rubble.

He and Carls moved to the pile of rocks, their eyes scanning the dusty heap. Around them, a handful of rough miners and adventurers loitered, clearly keeping a watchful eye on newcomers.

'No wonder they let us in so casually—they've got enforcers inside,' Damon thought.

Carls grew bored within minutes, aimlessly tossing rocks aside. Damon, however, hesitated. The more he scrutinized the pile, the more all the rocks seemed the same—dirty, unimpressive, and utterly random.

With a sigh, Damon was about to give up entirely when an idea struck him. He glanced at Carls.

"Go check that side of the pile. I'll take this one. Meet me back here with whatever you think looks good."

Carls raised an eyebrow but shrugged.

"Alright, whatever." He wandered off, leaving Damon with some much-needed space.

Crouching low, Damon cast a glance at his shadow.

"Hey," he whispered, "can you help me pick the ones with good stuff inside? No need to move—just point them out subtly."

His shadow rippled slightly in response, acknowledging his request. Damon knew his shadow had a strange perception of the world, able to see things that ordinary eyes couldn't. If it could see souls, surely it could identify hidden treasures.

Moments later, the shadow's tendril-like edges pointed toward a rock about the size of Damon's palm. He picked it up, noting the odd eagerness in his shadow's movements.

"This one?" he asked under his breath.

Read new adventures at [empire](#)

The shadow seemed to shiver with excitement.

Trusting its judgment, Damon set the rock aside and waited as the shadow pointed him to a few more. When it finally shook itself, signaling there was nothing else of value in the shop, Damon nodded.

Carls returned with a handful of randomly chosen rocks.

"This is all I found. Want any of these?"

Damon's shadow gave a faint gesture of dismissal.

"No need. I've got what I wanted. Let's go pay and head to a smith."

Carls eyed Damon suspiciously but didn't argue, shrugging as they approached the counter. Damon dropped his chosen rocks onto the counter with a loud clatter, then pushed over the payment.

The half-drunk overseer grunted, eyeing the coins before nodding. He reached for a hammer.

"Let's see what ya got, kid."

Damon raised a hand to stop him.

"That won't be necessary. I'll take them as they are."

The man blinked, confused.

"You sure, kid? Don't wanna know if you won... or lost?" His lips twisted into a mocking grin.

Damon smiled faintly, pulling up his hood. "I prefer to leave it to the goddess of fate."

Carls smirked, folding his arms.

'He must be pretty sure he made a killing today.'

The overseer shrugged, already losing interest.

"Whatever. Take your junk and go."

Damon loaded the rocks into his bag, careful not to draw attention. Leaving them unbroken was a calculated move—if there were rare ores inside, he didn't want anyone following him. As far as the shop's patrons were concerned, he was just a foolish kid hauling worthless rocks.

Once outside, Damon cast a glance at his shadow, which flickered faintly in the sun light.

'Let's hope my gamble pays off.'