

Living Shadow 69

Chapter 69 Magic Artillery

The magic artillery was originally developed as a weapon during the demon wars on the magic continent. Over time, however, it was repurposed for training, its deadly potential now serving as a tool to forge capable combatants.

This sophisticated magic technology fired projectiles imbued with various elemental attributes. Water was the slowest and easiest to dodge, while light was the fastest and most difficult to counter. The system was designed to push students to adapt to attacks of varying speeds and elements, a skill critical for high-speed battles against demons and monsters.

Of course, the magic artillery was just one of many training facilities the academy boasted. Aether Academy's reputation as the world's premier institution for magical education wasn't without merit.

Damon stood before the equipment, his hands clenched at his sides as he took a deep breath. His eyes scanned the array of weapons available—each stronger and more durable than the ones used for sparring. These weren't meant for dueling one another but rather for deflecting the relentless barrage of the magic artillery.

The rules of the duel were straightforward: last as long as possible while facing the artillery. Dodging, deflecting, erecting barriers, or even tanking the attacks were all valid methods. The difficulty—and thus, the points—depended on the attribute chosen for the artillery's projectiles. Light, being the fastest, was the highest setting allowed for first-year students.

The weapons laid out were primarily for deflecting the attacks, though shields were also available. However, shields came with a drawback: they had a limited number of hits they could withstand before shattering.

Damon's thoughts drifted back to Professor Kael Blackthorn's explanation of the rules. The professor's disdain for him had been palpable, especially when he openly encouraged Xander to obliterate him.

'What weapon should I choose...' Damon mused, his eyes narrowing as he scanned the arsenal again.

He could feel the weight of expectation in the room, the unspoken judgment from his peers and Professor Blackthorn alike. But Damon wasn't here to fail, and he certainly wasn't here to give anyone the satisfaction of seeing him falter.

A broadsword would do, but it was too heavy for fast movement, and Damon didn't have the skill to wield it effectively.

A longsword was too thin, its reach wasted on someone like him. He didn't even bother considering blunt weapons. A shield? Out of the question—it would slow him down and, worse yet, had a limit to how many hits it could take. To someone like him, who couldn't conjure barriers with magic, that restriction felt downright unfair.

He sighed, his shadow perception scanning the rows of weapons before him. The shapes and forms blurred in his mind until his focus stopped on the short swords. He picked one up, feeling its balance.

'Maybe I overestimated myself,' he thought grimly, shaking his head.

No. He couldn't afford doubt, not now. He held the short sword briefly before placing it back. It was an option—if he didn't find anything better.

As he moved further down the aisle, his perception caught the faint outline of daggers on a nearby shelf. Most were too thin, useless for deflecting powerful attacks. Just as he turned away in frustration, an unusual distortion flickered at the edge of his perception—a subtle ripple in the shadows. His brows furrowed beneath his black blindfold.

He walked toward the source, his fingers brushing against the twin daggers that caught his attention. They felt... different. Their weight was perfect, their balance exceptional. But most of all, their edges were wide enough to catch the light, reflecting it like glass. That was what had caused the distortion in his shadow perception.

A smirk tugged at Damon's lips.

'Yes, these will do. They should be able to reflect—or in this case, deflect—light.'

He glanced down at his shadow, the faintest flicker of uncertainty crossing his mind.

'That is, assuming my theory is correct. If not, I'm about to humiliate myself... but that's fine. I should have at least an 80% chance of pulling this off. And if not... well, I'll use my 15 attribute points to cover my weaknesses.'

"Are you ready, or do you intend to stand there all day?"

Kael Blackthorn's cold voice cut through Damon's thoughts like a blade.

Damon scoffed, turning his head slightly.

"Your opponent has already chosen his weapon. If you think you can't do this, just admit you're a failure and let us proceed with our regular class."

"Why would I give you the satisfaction, professor?"

Damon replied dryly, his voice calm despite the provocation.

Kael's icy glare bore into him, but the professor no longer felt anger—only disdain. After all, Xander Ravenscroft was sure to humiliate this disappointment of a student.

The murmurs of the class filled the room, their words sharp and cutting.

"That Damon guy is insane. It's one thing after another with him."

"Yeah, but can you blame him? Total loser."

"He's going to get expelled soon anyway. Might as well act crazy while he still can."

"If I were a probationary student, my family would disown me."

"Wearing that mark of shame? I'd rather die."

Damon let the insults roll off him. If he'd allowed mere words to break him, he wouldn't have survived this long. But he didn't forget them either. One day, he'd make them eat their words.

He twirled the glass-like daggers in his hands, throwing them into the air and catching them effortlessly.

Kael's gaze narrowed.

"Those are falsity daggers. The material is durable but prone to breaking when faced with blunt-attribute attacks. Is this your choice?"

"Yes, it is," Damon replied firmly.

The professor shook his head, his disappointment evident.

"Poor judgment, as always. And here I almost had expectations for you. Once again, you disappoint me."

Damon said nothing. He didn't need to explain himself. He knew what he was doing.

Leona Valefier rushed up to him, her expression a mix of curiosity and concern.

"Your weapon of choice is... twin daggers?"

Damon sneered. "If you're here to tell me I made a foolish choice, I suggest you shove it."

Leona blinked, taken aback.

"Why would I think that? You're the second smartest person I know—after Sylvia."

His blindfold hid his reaction, but her words caught him off guard.

"I see. Good to know I'm only second," he muttered sarcastically.

Leona didn't catch the remark, smiling warmly.

"Beat him and make me dinner."

Damon raised an eyebrow. "You're so sure I can beat him, huh? And how is me making you dinner a reward for me?"

Leona ignored his sarcasm, her confidence in him oddly endearing despite his doubts about calling her a friend.

"Caw caw! Evil, evil!"

Damon turned at the sound, finding Sylvia standing nearby, her mischievous smile as sharp as ever.

"You must be really confident if you're already making promises to Leona," Sylvia teased.

"I didn't make any promises," Damon shot back. "It's just a transaction she's paying for."

Sylvia grinned. "In that case, how much to include me as well?"

Before Damon could respond, Professor Kael's voice rang out cold and commanding.

"Combatants, step up!"

Xander and Damon approached the field, standing before a flight of stairs leading to the magic artillery.

"Choose an attribute," Kael instructed.

Xander smirked, turning to Damon.

"I'll let you choose. Think of it as a handicap for the weakest."

Damon sneered, stepping up to the metal dial. "Famous last words."

His hand hovered over the settings for a moment before he turned the dial to its maximum.

"In that case, I select the highest attribute—light."

The class fell silent. A beat passed before the room erupted into murmurs, their disbelief palpable.