

Living Shadow 72

Chapter 72 Clash Of Wills

Damon took deep, jagged breaths, his chest rising and falling steadily as he studied Xander's paling face. Outwardly, his expression was calm, but his [Shadow Perception] betrayed the stark truth. Being able to sense the light beams' trajectories didn't mean he could always react in time.

A prickly sensation crawled over his skin, accompanied by a cold dread that sank deep into his chest. He recognized this feeling all too well. It was the sensation of death looming near, a stark reminder that he could die at any moment.

He should have been afraid. He should have considered forfeiting. But his [Remorseless] skill dulled such thoughts, showing him a singular path forward. Victory was the quickest way to earn the money he desperately needed—to give his sister a chance at a better life, to pay for her medical care.

'Death isn't going to stop me,' he thought resolutely.

With that, he pointed his glass daggers toward Xander, taking a battle stance.

His breathing steadied, his heart calmed, and his mind became void of hesitation.

No hesitation in action, no pause for regret.

This was the philosophy of the [Remorseless] skill.

The arena brightened suddenly, tens of beams of light magic surging through the mirrored space. Damon felt the distortions they caused to the shadows, but they were moving far too fast. Reacting to all of them was impossible. His only choice was to focus entirely on the beams closest to him.

Sidestepping one beam, he spun around, slashing at another with one of his daggers. The blade connected, and he felt the impact ripple through his arm—it was almost like striking a solid object. He staggered briefly but didn't stay still.

He had boosted his speed earlier, and now he used it to his full advantage. Darting across the arena, he wove between the beams, his glass daggers slashing and deflecting the relentless attacks as they ricocheted across the room.

But even with his enhanced speed, he was barely holding on. The beams increased in number and ferocity, forcing him to move faster and faster.

Xander wasn't faring much better. He ran with his sword in hand, several gravity barriers floating around him. However, cracks spider-webbed across their surfaces, and each light beam that struck them either broke or further weakened the barriers.

Sweat poured down Xander's face as he strained to recreate the barriers each time one shattered. His focus was split between maintaining his defenses and avoiding the beams. Glancing at Damon, he couldn't help but feel a twinge of surprise.

'How is that commoner able to move so fast? No, it's not just speed—he's anticipating the light magic attacks. But how?'

Xander rolled to the side, slashing at a beam coming at him from an angle. His movements were sharp but calculated. However, there was more to his technique than skill alone.

Unbeknownst to Damon, Xander was using his gravity magic. Each slash wasn't purely physical. He manipulated the gravitational pull around his blade, subtly drawing the beams toward him and ensuring they collided with his sword.

'But I can't sense any mana from his daggers,' Xander thought, his brows furrowing.

'How can someone who hasn't even reached their first class advancement deflect light magic without any enchantments?'

His musings were cut short as one of his barriers shattered before he could reposition it. A stray beam grazed his arm, and he stumbled, a sharp groan escaping his lips as pain flared through his body.

The barrier had absorbed most of the attack, sparing him from a fatal blow, but the heat of the magic left his skin scorched. The scent of burning flesh filled the air, mixing with the acrid smell of sweat.

Xander's grip on his sword tightened as he steadied himself, his breathing ragged but his resolve unwavering.

'I can't lose to that commoner. Not today. Never.'

Damon was running out of breath. His joints ached, his muscles screamed in protest, and cold sweat dripped from his forehead. But despite the strain on his body, his mind remained calm. Through his [Shadow Perception], he caught sight of Xander stumbling. A cold smile spread across his lips.

'I suppose it's time to make my move.'

He tightened his grip on the twin glass daggers. He hadn't been slashing mindlessly; each strike had been calculated. Over time, he'd been learning how to control the trajectory of the light beams that struck his daggers, redirecting them where he wanted. It was dangerous and unpredictable, but Damon had no other choice. He needed to push himself further, relying on the one stat that could make the difference: his agility.

'[5x] to agility.'

With a thought, he activated his skill.

[Agility: 85] [5x]

His agility skyrocketed from 17 to 85. Instantly, the tension in his joints eased, and his body felt light, almost like rubber. Damon twisted and bent unnaturally, his movements fluid as he waved the daggers in a circular motion. Light beams struck their glass-like surfaces, but instead of scattering aimlessly, they ricocheted toward Xander with deadly precision.

The redirected beams slammed into Xander's barriers, shattering them like fragile glass.

Xander's eyes widened in disbelief.

"Wh...what...?"

Damon didn't give him a moment to recover. He pursued the beams, allowing them to attack him while deftly dodging and redirecting them back toward Xander.

Damon was ruthless, each movement devoid of hesitation or mercy. He aimed for the most vulnerable points, letting the beams strike in ways that could have ended Xander's life. Victory was all that mattered to him now—whether Xander Ravenscroft survived or not was irrelevant.

Xander's breathing quickened as he scrambled to conjure new barriers, the redirected light beams coming from unexpected and near-impossible angles. Damon's tactics were unorthodox, almost underhanded, and Xander couldn't help but feel trapped.

"You...you...! If you think these petty tricks can defeat me, then you've got another thing coming!" Xander snarled, his voice shaking with frustration.

Damon sneered, bouncing off a nearby wall as he redirected another beam of light toward Xander.

"I'm not the one under pressure here. You are. I told you—I'm going to win."

Despite his confidence, Damon was painfully aware of his limitations. He had no barriers to protect himself; a single misstep could mean his end. Worse, his boosted agility came with a time limit. The [5x] skill lasted only five minutes, with a cooldown of ten minutes. He also knew the magic artillery was growing more intense by the second.

'I have to finish this within five minutes,' he thought grimly. 'I can't lose. I need that money.'

Xander's thoughts mirrored Damon's desperation.

'I can't lose. My honor is on the line.'

Their gazes locked, Xander's deep blue eyes filled with fury and determination, while Damon's blindfold obscured his own, giving him an air of unwavering resolve.

'I will beat him.'

They both thought the same thing, their wills colliding in an unspoken battle of grit.

Suddenly, the magic artillery shifted again. This time, glowing orbs floated out, hanging ominously in the air. As they reached their targets, the orbs brightened and exploded like bombs, the concussive force rattling the arena.

Damon and Xander clenched their teeth, their focus sharper than ever.

'I must end this now.'