

CHAPTER 129: COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT

“They fucking *copied* me?!” Sam bellowed.

“Yes,” Lenal said urgently. “I told you they were dangerous! They will copy your every action perfectly. There is one silver lining, however.”

Sam looked over his shoulder at her and out of the corner of his eye, he saw his copy do the same thing to the empty air behind it.

“Yeah?”

“While the [Plagiaras] formed, the [Ridewords] can’t do anything else, so you won’t have to worry about them.”

“So somebody else could—”

“I’m afraid not,” Lenal said. “The [Ridewords’] lifeforce is tethered to the shadow copy. They are, effectively, inside the creature. To kill them is to kill the creature and vice versa.”

“Of course,” Sam said with a grumble. Several other [Ridewords] lashed out with wordchains, but not at Sam. At his copy, the [Plagiaras].

The creature didn’t fight the way Sam did, and before Sam knew it, there were four shadow copies all staring at him. Several [Ridewords] fluttered off into the distance, and as Sam went to intercept them, the four [Shadow Sams] mimicked his movements and barred his way.

“Any other tips?” Sam asked.

“They know everything you do, and will mimic you perfectly... so try not to use anything that’ll kill us?”

“Lovely.”

Sam rolled his shoulders and moved his greatsword slowly around until he held it in both hands. All four copies did the same, motion for motion, without the slightest delay.

They weren’t just copying him—which implied some level of delay—they were mirroring his every movement as if he was looking into... well, a mirror.

“This is getting silly,” Sam said, watching their moves move soundlessly. “At least they can’t speak.”

They weren’t exactly aggressive, from what Sam could tell. If he stayed still, how long could he hold them here like this? But then again... perhaps that was the point.

This was a surprisingly effective way of locking a single fighter down. He could volunteer to stay here, move the creatures to the side, and let his allies through... but then what?

“Can’t you throw a rock—?”

“They are locked to your mana signature,” Lenal explained.

“Nobody can harm them but you. The inverse is true as well. They pose no risk in their current form to anybody else but yourself.”

“I don’t like the way you said ‘in their current form’, what do you mean by that?”

“There have been... rumors that some more powerful [Ridewords] can free themselves from a person’s grip, taking their powers while not copying their every move.”

Sam didn’t like the sound of that.

I could try Breaking them... that's supposed to be something unique to me, but if they have everything I have then... they might have that too.

Sam shuddered at the thought of 5 Breaker bloodline abilities going off at once. They would be buried alive.

So that was a non-starter.

He began charging [Heavy Blade] and watched with astonished amusement as four other [Heavy Blades] materialized in the [Plagiarases'] hands.

It didn't take a genius to see where this was going to go, but Sam figured he ought to try, anyway. After all, he never claimed to be a genius.

All five [Heavy Blades] impacted at the same time. There was a flash of blinding silvery light and then Sam, along with the four [Plagiarases] were all blasted backward from the colliding force.

Several pillars shifted uneasily from the resulting concussive shockwave and Sam nearly flattened Lenal with his body as he crashed into the pile of rubble.

Bricks and mortar rained down on him, bouncing off his armor without harm. It sounded like somebody was ringing a bell inside his head.

"All right," Sam said, taking a quick glance at his abilities. "No Swordsman abilities, got it."

He got up, picked up his blade, and sheathed it in one smooth motion. There would be far too much damage with it out, and he didn't want a repeat of the [Heavy Blade] incident.

There was no way the pillars of the undercroft could survive another attack like that. And Sam was still accounted plenty strong

with his bare hands, though he hadn't needed to fight bare-handed yet, he wasn't a stranger to it.

Growing up as a non-native in Hawai'i, even one of the more 'modern' islands like O'ahu, he had gotten into his fair share of fights as a kid for taking offense at being called a haole.

It was a word he'd been called often enough. Hard not to be when, despite being born in O'ahu proper, you look like a mainlander. There were ways to say haole that weren't offensive. It was all in the tone, and context, really.

The tone had only changed when he started to bloody some noses. Respect was earned, and he had enough bruised knuckles and black eyes to back up his claim that he wouldn't take being talked down to.

But what could he do here? Grapple with his shadow selves, hoping that somehow, they had less HP than he did? Any punch, knee, or elbow he threw was one he'd get four times over.

Even if they had a fraction of his HP, he didn't like his odds.

Sam stepped forward until he could see the faint glint in each of their eyes with his Dark Vision. "You're a bunch of handsome devils, you know that?"

Ruffling his own hair, Sam amused himself by watching the others do the same thing. "I could probably use a haircut sometime soon."

"Are you... flirting with your shadows?" Lenal asked, scandalized.

"I am testing a theory," Sam told her.

"You're not going to make out, are you?"

"I hadn't thought of that. But, alas, no."

He could see the [Ridewords] in the breast of each of his clones. They weren't exactly hiding, but then again, he'd have to expose

himself to being skewered if he were going to try to impale the [Rideword] as well.

And... well, he *could* do it. But Sam would only get one chance.

Sam wasn't big on martyrdom, however, and he had a much better idea. An idea that spread a slow grin across his face and all of his clones.

"You're forgetting one thing," he told them, watching their mouths mimic his perfectly. "You're creatures from Islegard, and you have to obey the Shard's rules, right?"

He motioned back and forth with one hand, watching them all copy him.

"But there's something I have that *isn't* from any Shard." Sam lashed out with one hand raised to the nearest shadow. Cold numbing fire washed up from his chest and rolled down his arm in a wave of silver-black fire erupting from his hand.

Using [Void: Scour], Sam obliterated one of the [Shadow Sams]. They all mimicked the movement, true, but *they* didn't have Void mana.

"Oh, this is too easy," Sam said, laughing. The [Ridewords], realizing something was very wrong, tried to extricate themselves from their clones.

Sam didn't give them the chance.

The remaining three [Plagiarases] collapsed, with their [Ridewords] falling to the ground as inanimate books devoid of all mana and life.

You defeat a [Rideword (Level 25 - Copper)].

You defeat a [Plagiaras (Level 24 - Copper)].

You gain substantial Experience for slaying a Tough monster & its summon!

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Sam shook out the numbness from his hand and reminded himself that he should use Void Arts more often. It seemed if he killed a creature with Void magic, all of its Experience went to his Path.

And since his Void Path was quite a few levels beneath his Swordsman, it gained levels quite a bit faster.

Unfortunately, the other [Ridewords] had escaped. Sam didn't know what kind of trouble they would cause, but he had wanted to kill them on the simple principle that he could let them copy him and then easily destroy them.

They were free Experience at this point since they couldn't wield Void mana like he could. It was almost sad how the creatures had thrust up their hand like he had, only to have nothing happen.

Sam could feel the welling energy of the level up coming, but when it hit, he was very nearly knocked off his feet.

The harrowing call of the Void beckons you.

Komachi yowled beyond the rubble. Lightning flashed through the crevices, spoiling his Dark Vision momentarily, and illuminating Sam enough that even Lenal could see him the moment he vanished.

Lenal's scream on the other side of the rubble was drowned out as a [Rideword] swooped down, lashing a wordchain at Raiko's sword arm.

And that was where the animated book went wrong. That brought its attack closer to her reach.

Constraining [Rift: Ancient Magic] into her blade took considerably more effort than slicing clean through the wordchain. Largely magic in substance, the [Ridewords] were exceptionally vulnerable to magical damage.

Even a standard rift might have achieved the same destructive effect, but to switch off of [Rift: Ancient Magic] was a risk.

The more she wielded it against the [Ridewords], the quicker she could unleash its burst spell.

At least the element lingered on Lightning, one of the few types of mana Raiko possessed an affinity for.

"A little help!" Matt cried. One of his needle-like daggers went wide as a particularly tenacious [Rideword] ensnared his ankles and pulled his feet out from under him.

An arcing rift of Lightning mana split through the chain leading to his bindings, dropping him painfully back onto the ground.

A follow up rift slanted up through the air, crashing into the [Rideword] in a shower of sparks.

You defeat a [Rideword (Level 25)].

You gain substantial Experience for slaying a Tough monster!

Level Up!

Your [Ninja] Job has reached Level 24.

+6 Agility | +4 Resonance | +3 Control

+3 Arcane | +2 Dexterity | +2 Mind

+1 Awareness | +1 Insight

+2 Bonus Points

Matt viciously and repeatedly stabbed at what remained around his legs with those poison needles. Poison frothed out of the wordchain, melting it to nothingness.

“Keep [Haste Mazurka] up, Komachi! Try to concentrate it, as strong as possible,” Raiko asked of the Bard bunkered down in her hat. Specially crafted, one of the few remnants of old Islegard, it was suitable for accommodating soul aeder.

It was quite roomy in there with a magical enchantment similar to her [Initiate Inventory Pouch], but without the sequestering pocket dimension-like effect.

In short, Komachi could see through the hat, but the space within was larger than the outside.

The upbeat music filtering out of it diminished the sounds of battle all around, making Raiko’s Awareness and Insight stats less

effective. If that was the price for keeping Komachi safe and close, within casting range as well, it was well worth the downside.

She had yet to see something strike the Bard directly, which would likely interrupt her spellcasting, if not just outrightly knock the cat out. Raiko didn't plan on letting it happen.

“Heh, Machi got a skill up!” the cat said excitedly.

Raiko dashed up the wall, the intensifying effect of [Haste Mazurka] granting her even greater speed.

With Agility being her highest stat, that Bard spell enhanced her abilities to an exceptional degree. A buff applying to something already high just made it go all that much further.

Blade flashing out of its sheath, several Lightning rifts snapped into the swooping [Ridewords]. Not enough to destroy them in a single blow, but it slowed them down.

Their covers sparked with electricity, and then Matt's poison daggers thumped into their pages, one [Rideword] after another.

His daggers weren't an initial strike of high damage, like Sam's [Heavy Blade] was, but inflicted damage over time. Raiko could practically see the debilitating effect take place with every frothing bubble.

Meanwhile, Kai worked with Chompers to clear the rubble. [Nature Crystals] were scattered about so that the Shaman could see. He seemed to be the only one of their group that couldn't see in the dark, aside from Lenal.

With their group separated, the fate of Sam and Lenal on the other side uncertain, they needed to get through fast.

Vines emerged from the bricks, bracing the walls and rubble. Some pulled at the rubble, but most of Kai's effort went towards making sure the whole thing didn't collapse on top of them.

Chompers was doing the lion's share of chewing through the stone and debris. Chest-sized chunks disappeared from the rubble, bite after bite from the mimic.

A passage opened through the rubble. It began to threateningly rumble, but Kai's vines braced it.

Raiko skidded down the wall, then dropped onto the ground into a three-point landing.

Matt groaned, struggling to his feet. "Show off."

"Yeah, yeah, I'm not the one injured." She grabbed his arm and slung it over her shoulder, helping him through after Kai and Chompers.