

ShadowBound 153

Chapter 153: Threat Of Day One

"What the hell is that heading our way?" Edith said, concern etched into her voice and visible in her gaze.

"Whatever it is, I—I don't think we should stick around to find out, right?" Robin stammered, nervously fidgeting with his quiver.

"I agree with him," Karla said, her voice betraying her anxiety as she shifted closer to Edith.

"Same here. Let's lose whatever that is and find shelter before we start thinking about fighting demons," Edith declared, trying to sound composed.

"You shut up and don't move," Lucian snapped as he crouched down, placing his palm firmly against the ground. Closing his eyes, he focused, his jaw tightening.

Everyone watched him in confusion until his eyes flew open moments later. "Three Demon Wolves. Roughly 15 feet tall at the shoulder. They're massive," he said firmly, his tone leaving no room for doubt.

"How did you—?" Karla started to ask, but Lucian cut her off.

"Not the time for questions. Right now, there are three Demon Wolves headed straight for us. Like gingerhead and Edith suggested, it's best we flee and find shelter before we consider a fight," he said decisively.

"That would be stupid and suicidal," Liam interjected bluntly.

All eyes turned toward him. Edith frowned. "What do you mean stupid? Are you saying we should stay here and fight?"

"Precisely," Liam replied without hesitation. "If they truly are Demon Wolves, running is pointless. They have an exceptional sense of smell and are relentless hunters. They will track us down regardless of how far or fast we run. Surely you all know that."

His words hung in the air, the weight of the truth sinking in. Liam's gaze lingered on Lucian. 'They might not all know, but Lucian does. We're in the same class, after all. Now I just need him to agree with me. That way, we don't have to follow the 'flee' plan or the 'fight' plan. At least it will seem that way.'

"What I'm saying is this," Liam continued. "Whether we flee or stay, we'll still end up fighting them. On foot, or even with magic aiding us, they'll catch up. I suggest we turn the tables and ambush them instead. What do you think, Lucian?"

Lucian's eyes narrowed, scrutinizing Liam as if trying to figure out his angle. 'Why is this guy asking for my opinion? Is he trying to make me a pawn in whatever he's planning? Tsk. As much as I hate to admit it, he's right. What a pain.'

"I agree with him," Lucian said finally. "Running or fighting outright ends the same way. Ambushing them gives us an edge. Demon Wolves may be classified as Ferals—the weakest demons—but we can't afford to underestimate them."

"Wait," Edith said, holding up a hand. "I get that you Class A students have better training and intel, but we can't just blindly go along with this because you two are on the same page."

"Sorry, but we ha—" Lucian started.

"The decision is in your hands, Edith," Liam interrupted, cutting him off mid-sentence.

"What?" Lucian said, incredulous.

"You've already shown leadership," Liam continued. "Your boldness, quick analysis of our fighting styles, and decision-making so far make you the most qualified to lead. I believe the others would agree."

Lucian stared at him, stunned. 'This guy... is he serious? After all that, he's handing over leadership to Edith? A Class B student?'

"Yeah, I agree with Liam," Karla said, nodding enthusiastically. "You've got leader energy, Edith."

"Same here," Robin chimed in. "You're a natural fit."

Lucian grumbled, clearly irritated. "Tsk. Fine. Majority wins. Whatever you guys say."

With all eyes on her, Edith hesitated, taking a deep breath before exhaling slowly. "Fine, then," she said, her voice steady. "I'll take the role. My decision is..."

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The clearing fell silent, devoid of any movement. Moments later, three massive Demon Wolves emerged from the shadows, their hulking forms cutting an imposing silhouette. Their thick black fur glistened in the dim light, bristling with sharp, quill-like spikes. Saliva dripped from their jagged maws as their glowing crimson eyes scanned the surroundings.

The wolves slowed, sniffing the air with a predator's precision, their breaths low and guttural. The largest of the three, standing in the middle, raised its snout, inhaling deeply. A low, menacing growl escaped its throat as it stalked toward a seemingly random patch of ground, its steps calculated yet heavy with intent.

It lowered its head, sniffing the earth itself now, its growl intensifying. Without warning, it began clawing furiously at the dirt, its massive paws tearing into the ground with savage determination.

Then, before it could dig further, the earth beneath the wolf suddenly caved in. A hidden trapdoor opened in an instant, and an intense burst of heat erupted from the hole, accompanied by a fiery blaze. A shadowed figure exploded upward, moving faster than the eye could follow.

The wolf barely had time to react. A swift, clean sound cut through the air—a blade slicing through flesh. The massive beast's body was cleaved in half with surgical precision, dark blood erupting like a geyser

and painting the ground in a macabre display. The remaining two wolves froze, their predatory instincts momentarily overtaken by shock.

The figure landed gracefully in the pool of dark blood, his silhouette framed by the faint glow of embers still flickering around him. In his hand was a sword with a pristine white hilt, its blade dripping with the blackened blood of the slain wolf.

"One down. Two more to go," Liam said.

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Few Minutes Earlier

"My decision is that we ambush the wolves," Edith declared firmly, her eyes scanning the group for confirmation. "But the real question now is: How do we pull it off?"

"Yeah, you're right. We can't just say we're ambushing them without a solid plan," Lucian added, which sent everyone into a moment of quiet contemplation—except Liam, who remained observant.

As the others pondered, Liam's sharp gaze alternated between Lucian and the ground. 'I don't know how well he can use his earth magic, but if he can do what I think he can, then we have a solid plan already. However, I'd rather not be the one to point it out,' he mused.

Breaking the silence, Liam finally spoke. "What if we got underground?" His focus remained on the ground as he made the suggestion.

"Wait a second," Edith said quickly, "Lucian, how good are you with your magic?"

Liam suppressed a smirk. 'She's quicker than I expected. If this goes well, all the upcoming times here will be easy for me to operate.' His plan was simple: plant the seed of an idea and let Edith, the newly appointed leader, take ownership of it. That way, the attention stayed off him while the group worked toward his goal.

"Good enough," Lucian replied curtly.

"Are you good enough to create a hole big enough to fit all five of us inside?" Edith pressed.

After a brief pause, Lucian nodded. "I believe I can. It'll take a bit of time, though."

"Perfect. Start working on it now. We'll use it to position ourselves for a surprise attack. If we can take one of the wolves out instantly, we'll have the upper hand. But the question is—how do we manage that?" Edith asked, glancing at the group.

"If I may," Liam interjected, raising his hand slightly. "I think I can handle taking out the first wolf in one strike, but for that to work, I need you all in separate holes—if possible."

"You mean you want Lucian to create multiple 'rabbit holes' so the wolves won't know where we're attacking from?" Edith asked, her brows furrowing as she considered the idea.

"Precisely," Liam said with a calm nod.

"But why separate us like that?" Edith questioned.

"Because for me to kill the first wolf in one strike, I'll need a significant burst of firepower to boost my speed. If you're too close, you'll get caught in the flames," Liam explained evenly.

"I see," Edith said, nodding slowly. "That's interesting. But doesn't separating us make it harder to track the wolves? What if one heads straight for someone else's hole?"

"That's true," Liam conceded, "but if we all stay in one hole at first and spread out just before the wolves arrive, all our scents will concentrate in one location, which..."

"Which will lure the wolves straight to your hole, thanks to their sharp sense of smell," Edith finished, catching on quickly.

"Exactly," Liam said.

"It's a solid plan, but there's one thing I don't understand," Karla interjected. "How do we know when the wolves are close enough for us to disperse?"

Another moment of silence fell over the group as they considered Karla's point. This time, Liam didn't bother thinking—he simply glanced at Lucian, waiting for him to take the lead.

After rubbing his chin thoughtfully, Lucian finally spoke. "I can tell when they're coming."

"Really?" Karla asked.

"Yes," Lucian said confidently.

"Perfect. That makes you the cornerstone of this entire plan, Lucian," Edith said, her tone commanding yet encouraging.

With that, Lucian began to use his earth magic. He extended his index and middle fingers, drawing a wide circle in the dirt that encompassed the entire group. With a deep breath, he raised his leg and stomped forcefully, sending a ripple through the ground. The earth beneath them sank inward, lowering everyone into an underground chamber with smooth, compacted walls.

Once they were safely below, Lucian raised his hands, guiding the soil above to close, creating an airtight seal. Darkness enveloped the group, but Liam quickly summoned a small flame in his palm, illuminating the chamber with a soft orange glow.

Lucian placed his hands on the curved wall, letting his myst flow into the soil. With deliberate strikes, he hit the wall at four distinct points—North, South, East, and West. The ground trembled as narrow channels extended outward in each direction, stretching about 20 feet from their current position.

Once the channels were formed, Lucian knelt and placed his hand against the northern tunnel. He muttered something under his breath, and a secondary hole opened at the far end, creating an exit point. He did the same to the rest as well.

"Alright, that should do it," Lucian said, standing and brushing his hands off. "But I think those Wolves will be close by now."

"Wait before we split up," Liam interjected, turning to Karla. "Can I borrow your sword? I promise I'll return it when this is over."

Karla hesitated, her hand tightening on the hilt of her weapon. "Umm... alright, but use it well," she said, unsheathing her sword and handing it to Liam.

"Thanks," Liam replied curtly.

Lucian crouched again, placing his palms flat on the floor. Less than five minutes his eyes snapped open.

"They're here," he announced, his voice tense.

'That was fast,' Liam thought.

"Alright, everyone, head into one of the tunnels now!" Edith commanded. "Liam, good luck."

As the group dispersed, each person took one of the tunnels. Lucian, lingering for a moment, sealed the entrances behind them with barriers of earth. Before heading into his own tunnel, he turned to Liam.

"I'll reopen the top in 30 seconds, so be ready by then," he said, his tone sharp with irritation.

"That's more than enough," Liam replied without looking.

Now left alone, Liam knelt in the center of the chamber. He gripped Karla's sword tightly in one hand.

'Accumulate and concentrate,' he told himself. 'Tense the muscles in your legs. Focus.'

The seconds ticked by. Above him, he could hear faint movements—heavy paws pressing against the soil, the faint growls of the Wolves. The moment the ceiling began to open, Liam's eyes caught sight of dark fur.

Without hesitation, Liam released a powerful burst of flame from his feet. The fiery propulsion launched him upward with blinding speed, turning his ascent into a lethal strike. The flames roared, channeling into Karla's blade, which now glowed with an intense orange hue.

The Demon Wolf above barely had time to react before Liam's sword sliced through its thick fur and flesh like paper. The creature let out a guttural snarl that was cut short as its body split cleanly in half. Dark blood sprayed across the clearing, pooling beneath Liam as he landed gracefully..

He rose to his feet, shaking some of the blood off the sword, and glanced at the two remaining wolves, their glowing eyes wide with shock and rage.

"One down, two more to go."