

ShadowBound 154

Chapter 154: Threat Slain

The two remaining Demon Wolves snarled in unison, their glowing eyes locked onto Liam. Their quills bristled, saliva dripping from their jagged maws as they took slow, deliberate steps toward him, growling low and menacingly.

'I could take them both out myself,' Liam thought, his grip tightening on the sword. 'But that won't help in this exam. If they see me acting alone, they'll mark me as reckless and incapable of teamwork.' He exhaled. 'Teamwork is the only way for me right now.'

"First Demon is slain!" Liam shouted, his voice echoing across the clearing to alert his teammates that their plan had worked.

In response, the earth around him shifted. Exactly 20 feet away in each cardinal direction, Lucian's tunnels opened, and his four teammates emerged one by one.

Lucian stepped out from Liam's left, brushing dirt off his shoulders with an air of nonchalance. From Liam's right, Karla emerged, her face tense as her eyes fixated on the wolves. Edith appeared directly ahead, shield and sword drawn, standing firm between the wolves and the group.

Behind Liam, Robin rose into view. Using his air magic, he flew to a branch on a towering tree, his bow drawn and an arrow already nocked, aimed at the wolves.

"Great job, Liam. I'll give you a pat on the head once this is over," Edith said, a smirk tugging at her lips as she readied her shield in front of her and her sword in her right hand.

"Please don't say that," Liam replied flatly before turning to Karla, who stood frozen, her hands trembling slightly.

"Here." Liam tossed her sword back. "Thanks for letting me borrow it. I'll use my own weapons now." Unsheathing his daggers, he twirled them in his hands. "And loosen up. You don't want a repeat of the enrollment trials, do you?" His voice was calm.

Karla nodded stiffly, gripping her sword tighter. Meanwhile, the Demon Wolves hesitated, their growls faltering as they assessed the sudden shift in numbers.

"What's the plan, Edith?" Lucian asked, his fists clenched. Brown, metallic gauntlets with intricate draconic designs materialized over his hands which captured Liam's eyes immediately.

"Wolves prefer to fight together, and that's a problem," Edith began, her voice steady and commanding. "Even if we outnumber them, their size and speed can turn the tide. We need to split them up."

"So you want to isolate one?" Lucian asked, flexing his gauntlets.

"Exactly. Use your earth magic to trap one in a prison it can't escape. That'll let us focus on the other."

Lucian frowned slightly. "I'm running low on myst after everything I've done so far, but I can manage."

"Don't worry," Edith said with a small, confident smirk, her eyes never leaving the wolves. "I'll make your job easier, which those fancy gauntlets will have to wait for another fight."

She activated her enhancement magic, and her body tensed, her muscles visibly bulging beneath her school uniform. A faint gray aura enveloped her as her strength surged.

"Alright, Liam," Edith continued. "You take the lead since you're our close-range specialist. Karla and I will support you. Let's show these predators who the real hunters are."

With a nod, Liam stepped forward, his daggers gleaming as flames flickered faintly along their edges. The wolves growled louder, sensing the tension, their bodies coiled like springs.

"Let's hunt," Edith said, her aura intensifying.

The Demon Wolves crouched low, their glowing eyes narrowing. They bared their teeth, their growls reverberating through the clearing like distant thunder. Liam adjusted his stance, his daggers raised, their edges glinting with faint ember trails of mystic fire.

"Lucian, get ready," Edith commanded. "Karla, you're with me. We'll back Liam up. Robin, keep those arrows trained—if either of these things moves toward Lucian, stop it immediately."

"Got it," Robin replied from his perch high above, his bowstring taut. His arrow shimmered faintly, charged with air-infused energy, ready to strike with speed and precision.

Karla stepped closer to Liam, her sword now steady in her grip, though her breaths came measured and deliberate. "Don't rush ahead," she muttered, her voice barely audible.

"Just keep up," Liam quipped, his eyes locked on the wolves as he shifted his weight.

Lucian exhaled deeply, his hands pressed firmly to the ground. Veins of myst glowed faintly as they spread like roots into the soil beneath him. "Alright, Edith," he said through clenched teeth, "I'll trap the one on the left first."

"Perfect. Liam, now!" Edith barked.

Liam moved in a blur, closing the distance between himself and the wolves in a heartbeat. His daggers twirled in his hands. The wolf on the left snarled and lunged at him, claws slashing through the space where Liam had been a moment before.

Liam sidestepped, flames flaring from his feet to propel him faster. As the wolf overextended, Liam slashed upward with his right dagger. Fire engulfed the blade as it tore into the creature's side, leaving charred fur and flesh in its wake. The wolf yelped in pain, stumbling backward.

Before it could recover, the ground beneath it erupted. Lucian's magic activated with a rumble, and jagged earthen walls shot up around the wolf, forming a tight prison. The creature howled in fury, slamming its claws against the walls, but it was trapped.

"One down!" Lucian called, sweat beading on his forehead. "Focus on the other!"

The second wolf wasted no time. With its partner contained, it turned its glowing eyes on Karla, sensing hesitation in her posture. It lunged, a blur of teeth and claws.

"Karla, move!" Edith shouted, charging forward with her shield raised.

Karla froze for a split second, fear rooting her to the ground. But her instincts kicked in just in time. She sidestepped as the wolf's jaws snapped inches from her shoulder. Edith intercepted the beast mid-leap, slamming her shield into its side with a resounding clang. The wolf was sent skidding across the clearing, but it recovered quickly, snarling in fury.

"Robin, now!" Edith yelled.

A sharp whistle cut through the air as Robin loosed his arrow. The air-infused shot struck the wolf's shoulder with a forceful impact, causing it to stumble and howl in pain.

"Lucian, trap its legs!" Liam shouted.

Lucian spread his hands wide before clenching his fists. Earthen shackles erupted from the ground, locking around the wolf's ankles and immobilizing it.

"Great, Lucian. Karla, Liam—strike its tendons!" Edith commanded.

Karla hesitated for a moment but dashed forward as soon as she saw Liam surge past her. Flames burst from his feet, propelling him into a twisting maneuver as he avoided the wolf's snapping jaws. With a flick of his wrist, he activated Inferno Edge, slashing through the tendons of the wolf's front legs in a fiery arc. The beast roared in agony, collapsing to its knees.

Karla followed Liam's lead, her sword glowing with water magic. She moved with newfound resolve, dashing to the wolf's hind legs. With a precise strike, she severed the tendons in its back legs, forcing the creature to the ground completely.

"Time to finish it," Edith declared, sprinting toward the fallen wolf. She leaped high, her enhanced strength propelling her upward. With a shout of determination, she brought her sword down in a clean, powerful strike, severing the wolf's head in one motion. Dark blood sprayed across the clearing as the creature's lifeless body crumpled.

"Two down, one more—" Edith's words died in her throat.

The earthen cage holding the third wolf shattered with a deafening crack, chunks of rock flying in all directions. The beast burst free, its eyes blazing with unbridled rage. Time seemed to slow as it lunged at Edith, its massive jaws open wide, mere inches from tearing into her.

The rest of the team also stood frozen in shock—except for Liam.

In a single, fluid motion, Liam unleashed a burst of flames from his feet, launching himself forward like a blazing comet. He passed by Edith so close that the heat of his flames brushed her skin. As the wolf's jaws closed in, Liam twisted his body midair, spinning like a wheel. Flames roared around him, boosting his momentum as his daggers slashed through the wolf's body with surgical precision.

The strike was perfect. The wolf stood frozen for a split second before its body split apart, its massive frame split cleanly from maw to tail, its halves falling apart in a grotesque spray of dark blood and steaming entrails.

Liam landed in a crouch, his daggers dripping with gore. The clearing was silent save for the heavy breathing of his teammates.

The scene was gruesome—blood pooled around the bisected wolf, its internal organs spilled across the ground. And amidst it all stood Liam, soaked in dark blood, his crimson eyes glowing faintly.

"None left."