

ShadowBound 168

Chapter 168: Horrors: The Three Vs The Skivoks

'I would like for Edith to take the lead right now, but this doesn't seem to be the time for that. If I don't push Karla this way, she might become a liability in this fight,' Liam thought, his gaze cold as it locked onto the Skivok.

"So, if you want to get out of here alive, get on your feet and get ready to fight for your life," Liam added.

Karla's eyes widened at the weight of his words, and so did everyone else's. They were used to Liam's detached demeanor, but hearing him speak so directly, so harshly, with no sugar-coating, showed them a side of him they didn't quite know. It wasn't cruelty—it was clarity. Survival.

Before Karla could respond, the Skivok let out a guttural hiss and retreated into the forest. The group snapped out of their daze as the rustling of leaves surrounded them, signaling the creatures weren't gone, just repositioning.

"Tsk," Lucian spat, scanning the trees. "These things make my skin crawl. And now we've got three of those freaks... plus that big bastard over there." He motioned to the Malgath, still standing ominously 80 meters away, its massive frame unmoving, as if observing them.

"Hey, Robin," Liam called. "Anything we need to know about these Skivoks?"

Robin, still visibly shaken, stammered, "W—well, they're regular Horrors, but... with a fraction of human reasoning. Their main ability is to drain life through open wounds, and their side abilities are poisonous claws and regeneration."

"Life drain and poisonous claws, huh," Liam muttered, glancing down at his own bicep. A shallow cut, left by the Skivok's claw earlier, had begun to blacken. Dark veins spread outward like creeping roots, and a faint sheen of sweat appeared on his brow.

The group's collective breath hitched as they noticed the spreading corruption.

"Liam, your arm—" Edith began, her voice filled with concern.

"Fine," Liam interrupted, wiping a trickle of blood from his mouth. "Focus on the fight. You three will handle the incoming Skivoks. Lucian and I will take care of the big one."

"What?" Edith protested, stepping forward. "Liam, this isn't the time to split up! These are Horrors—and an Advanced Horror. We should stick together and take them down as a group!"

"Nice idea, Edith," Liam replied, his tone even. "But that one over there," he gestured to the Malgath, "isn't just standing there for no reason. Advanced Horrors are far more intelligent than regular Horrors, and far more dangerous. If we focus solely on the smaller ones, that thing will pick us off when we're too distracted to react."

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His logic was sound, and though Edith wanted to argue, the grim truth of his words sank in. The rustling grew louder, closer, as the Skivoks approached.

Liam took a deep breath, closing his eyes for a moment. Then, suddenly, a faint hiss of steam rose from his arm. The black veins receded as quickly as they had appeared, but the wound returned. He flexed his fingers, rolling his shoulder as if nothing had happened.

The others stared in shock.

"How did you—" Robin started, but Liam cut him off with a sharp glance.

"No time for questions," he said, spinning one of his daggers. "Get into position. Karla, Edith, Robin—those three Skivoks are your priority. Keep them away from us and watch each other's backs."

Lucian stepped up beside Liam, his face set with determination. "You're really gonna make me fight that thing with you, huh?"

"Just shut up," Liam replied, his voice flat. "You're the best option I've got right now."

Lucian smirked, flexing his gauntlets slightly. "Fair enough."

As the group split into their respective roles, Karla hesitated for a moment before finally gripping her sword with steady hands. She nodded at Edith and Robin, determination hardening her features.

"Let's do this," she said, her voice firm, stepping into formation with them.

Liam watched her for a brief second with no expression. Then, turning to face the Malgath, he whispered under his breath, "Let's see how advanced you really are."

Liam and Lucian burst into a sprint toward the Malgath, but before they could close the distance, two Skivoks launched themselves from the canopy above, their claws gleaming as they dove in for the kill.

Just as the creatures were mere inches from tearing into Liam and Lucian, two arrows whistled through the air. Robin's first arrow pierced the shoulder of one Skivok, spinning it mid-air, while the second drove through the leg of the other, sending it crashing to the ground.

The Skivoks hit the forest floor hard, writhing in pain, but recovered quickly. Their soulless eyes turned toward Edith, Karla, and Robin with a guttural snarl.

"Good shot, Robin. Now we've got their attention," Edith said, banging her sword against her shield with a resounding clang. Her voice was steady. "We can't let these things interfere with Liam and Lucian. Whether they're stronger or not, we will win. That's a fact."

The Skivoks let out a low growl before darting back into the shadows of the forest, their forms vanishing like smoke. The sudden silence was deafening, broken only by the rustling of leaves.

"Robin, intel!" Edith barked, her voice sharp and commanding.

Robin hovered slightly above the ground, his bow at the ready. "Skivoks don't like direct combat. Even if their opponents are weaker—or stronger—they prefer to ambush and strike when you least expect it."

"Literal stealth hunters," Edith muttered, her grip on her shield tightening. She moved closer to Karla, positioning them back-to-back. "Robin, you're our eyes in the sky. Use your magic to enhance your vision and track them. If you can, shoot them down before they reach us."

Robin nodded, flying higher and channeling his myst into his eyes. His pupils glowed faintly, his enhanced vision cutting through the dense foliage like a hawk's. "Got it."

Edith glanced over her shoulder at Karla, who was trembling slightly but holding her sword tightly. "Karla, you good?"

Karla's voice wavered but was resolute. "Y—yes, I can do this."

"Good. Let's get to work." Edith activated her enhancement magic, her senses sharpening as her strength and speed surged. Her vision became razor-sharp, able to catch even the faintest movement in the forest.

Above them, Robin scanned the treetops, his enhanced sight catching the flicker of movement. He pulled back an arrow, his voice calm but urgent. "Edith, on your left!"

Edith didn't hesitate. As the Skivok lunged from the shadows, its speed blurring its grotesque form, an arrow from Robin struck its spine mid-air, disrupting its attack.

With a feral screech, the creature hit the ground, momentarily stunned. Edith seized the opening, stepping forward and slamming her shield into its face with a resounding crack. The force sent the Skivok reeling, its claws scraping uselessly against her shield as it tried to regain its footing.

"Good one, Robin!" Edith called out as she shoved the creature back.

Robin didn't respond, too focused on his next shot. Another arrow left his bow, carried by a gust of wind that accelerated its speed. The arrow hit with deadly precision, embedding itself deep into the Skivok's

shoulder and pinning it to the ground. It howled in agony, its movements frantic as black ichor spilled from its wounds.

The second Skivok burst from the shadows, charging at Karla from the opposite side. "Karla, behind you!" Robin yelled.

Karla spun on instinct, fear flashing in her eyes before she steeled herself. As the creature pounced, she sidestepped with newfound agility, slashing her sword across its side. The blade cut deep, but the Skivok's regeneration was already working to seal the wound.

"Karla, keep moving! Don't give it time to recover!" Edith shouted, stepping in to shield her from another strike.

Just as Karla was about to deliver another attack, the third Skivok launched from the thick bushes, its claws wide, aiming to slash her. But before it could land its attack, an arrow whistled through the air and pierced its limb, pinning it to the ground.

That wasn't all. Seizing the moment, Edith hurled her sword with incredible force, the blade spinning like a deadly wheel before slicing clean through the Skivok's pinned limb, severing it from its body.

The creature let out a guttural screech of pain, black ichor spilling from its wound like an overflowing fountain. But within seconds, the horrifying sight of regeneration took place—the ichor retracted, and new flesh began to grow, as if mocking their efforts.

The Skivok pinned to the ground gritted its jagged teeth, forcing the arrow out of its shoulder. Rising to its feet, its predatory eyes locked onto Robin, still hovering above. With a low, menacing growl, it darted back into the forest, vanishing into the shadows.

Robin's sharp gaze turned toward the other two Skivoks, who attempted to retreat as well. Not giving them the chance, he unleashed four arrows in rapid succession, two for each creature. The arrows struck true, piercing critical points—shoulders and legs—forcing the Skivoks to stagger and lose momentum.

"Now!" Edith commanded.

Edith dashed forward to retrieve her sword, while Karla summoned her water magic, forming tendrils around her blade that twisted and writhed like a living water whip. They closed the distance quickly, each preparing to strike.

But the Skivoks weren't so easily defeated. Their feral instincts kicked in, and they tore free from the arrows, dodging the incoming attacks with inhuman agility.

One of the creatures twisted its body mid-air, leaping to cling onto a nearby tree. It perched there for a brief moment before launching itself at Edith, faster than a blur.

Edith swung her sword, aiming to intercept the incoming threat. Her blade grazed the Skivok's side, but the creature twisted its grotesque form, evading the full impact. In the same motion, it brought both of its razor-sharp claws down in a vicious slash.

Edith cried out in pain as the claws tore into her thigh, leaving deep, jagged wounds. Black veins immediately began to spread from the injury, creeping across her skin like a dark curse. The force of the attack dropped her to one knee, blood pooling beneath her.

"Edith!" Karla screamed, panic flashing in her eyes as she saw their leader fall.