

ShadowBound 169

Chapter 169: Horrors: The Three Vs The Skivoks 2

Edith gritted her teeth, trying to push herself up, but the pain was excruciating, and the poison coursing through her veins was sapping her strength. The Skivok prepared for another strike, its glowing eyes locked onto her vulnerable form.

Karla's panic turned to fury. With a sharp cry, she lashed out with her water whip, the tendrils snapping through the air like thunder. The whip coiled around the Skivok's neck, yanking it backward before it could deliver the killing blow.

"You won't touch her again!" Karla shouted, channeling all her energy into her magic. The water tendrils tightened like a vice, and with a flick of her wrist, she slammed the creature into a nearby tree.

The Skivok screeched, clawing at the tendrils, but Karla's determination didn't waver. She glanced at Edith, whose breathing had grown labored. "Robin! I need cover now!" she yelled, her voice breaking slightly under the strain.

Robin didn't hesitate. Hovering above, he pulled another arrow from his quiver and fired. The projectile struck the Skivok struggling against Karla's whip, embedding itself in the creature's chest, close to the core. Black ichor sprayed from the wound, but the creature's regeneration began almost immediately.

Karla's grip on her magic faltered as exhaustion began to creep in. "They just keep regenerating..." she muttered, frustration lacing her tone.

Edith forced herself to speak through gritted teeth. "You have to... overwhelm them. Regeneration can only keep up... with so much damage at once."

Karla's eyes narrowed, her resolve hardening. "Then I'll make sure it doesn't get back up." She channeled her myst into her whip, the water glowing faintly as she infused it with more power. With a fierce cry, she slammed the Skivok to the ground once more, the force creating a small crater beneath it.

"Robin, finish it!" Karla shouted.

Robin's next arrows came faster than a blink, one piercing the Skivok's skull and pinning it to the ground, the second and third piercing right through its core. This time, the creature didn't move, its body twitching before going still.

Karla released a shaky breath, her hands trembling as the water tendrils dissolved. But the battle was far from over—the remaining Skivok let out a blood-curdling roar, charging toward her in a blind fury.

Before it could reach her, Edith, fueled by sheer willpower, hurled her sword with all her remaining strength. The blade struck the creature's chest, pinning it against a tree. "Not... today," she muttered, collapsing to the ground, her strength finally giving out.

"Karla, get her to safety!" Robin yelled as his eyes scanned for the third Skivok.

Before Karla could reach Edith, a sickening sound of movement caught her attention. Slowly, she turned her head, her breath hitching at the sight of the Skivok pinned to the tree. It was moving—its grotesque, sinewy body twisting and writhing. Bit by bit, it slithered upward, allowing the sword to slice clean through its torso.

The blade carved a horrific line, splitting the creature from chest to tailbone. Black ichor poured like a flood, soaking the ground and staining the tree's bark. The sight made Karla freeze in fear, she might his just demonstrated great skill and resolve just now but fear still lurked in her.

The Skivok's mutilated form stood still for a moment, a seemingly lifeless husk. But then it happened—the ichor began to flow backward, retreating into its body. With a sickening crack and pop, its torn flesh knitted back together, and within seconds, it stood whole again, its body as if untouched.

"I thought... she got the core."

The Skivok's glowing eyes fixed on Karla, and before she or Robin could act, it scaled the tree with terrifying speed, disappearing into the canopy above.

"Karla!" Robin's voice came from above. "It's circling. Stay sharp!"

The treetops shuddered as the creature moved unseen, its movements a blur of shadows and speed.

'Dammit... why can't I be like Liam or Lucian? They're fighting that huge thing over there, and they're still going.' Karla's thoughts were a storm of frustration as her trembling grip on her sword betrayed her doubt. Tears blurred her vision as she fell to her knees, despair etched across her face.

'Why am I this WEAKKK?!' she screamed inwardly, slamming her fist into the dirt.

Robin caught sight of her collapse and shouted over the chaos, "Hey, Karla! You can't be down now! You've shown you're a knight and a fighter. Don't stop now!" His voice was steady, but his own fear and doubt were thinly veiled beneath his encouraging tone.

Karla looked up at Robin, her tear-streaked face filled with raw emotion. She wanted to crumble, to let the fear and pressure consume her, but Robin's words struck something deep within her. 'This isn't the time for tears...' she thought, glancing at Edith's motionless form nearby. Her hands clenched into fists. 'Edith needs me. I can't stop now.'

"You're right. Two of these things are still out here," she muttered, her voice trembling but growing steadier as she rose to her feet. "I won't stop."

"Good! The next one's coming from your left!" Robin shouted, already drawing two arrows and infusing them with air magic.

Karla steadied her breathing, planting her feet firmly into the ground. Her grip on her sword tightened as she raised it with both hands, the blade beginning to glow as water myst enveloped it in an otherworldly sheen. The blade seemed alive, the water rippling with latent power.

She closed her eyes for a moment, listening to the approaching creature. She could hear its claws scraping against the bark above, the faint rustle of leaves as it moved in shadowy speed. Robin's sharp eyes caught its figure in the canopy, the Skivok leaping from tree to tree, closing in fast.

A deafening growl tore through the air as the Skivok lunged straight for Karla from above. She braced herself, ready to deliver a decisive strike as Robin aimed his arrows to finish it off. But before they could execute their coordinated attack, the unexpected happened.

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The third Skivok launched itself from the cliff near the cave, its monstrous form barreling toward Robin from his blind spot. Time seemed to slow as Karla caught the glint of movement. Her heart pounded in her chest as she made a split-second decision.

Robin loosed his arrows, the air magic around them howling as they flew with tenfold speed and power. Both projectiles pierced the lunging Skivok's core, sending it crashing into a tree with a sickening crunch, the black ichor splattering the ground as the creature twitched and fell still.

Meanwhile, Karla turned her attention to the Skivok targeting Robin. She pivoted on her heel, channeling every ounce of her water magic into her blade. The glowing water surged, forming a crescent arc around the blade as she swung with precision and fury.

"Crescent Moon!" she roared, the attack taking the shape of a razor-sharp water crescent. It shot forward like a tidal wave, slicing clean through the airborne Skivok in a diagonal slash. The force cleaved its core in two, and its entire body disintegrated mid-air, falling in chunks.

But the remains of the Skivok's body struck Robin mid-fall, disrupting his concentration. His flight spell faltered, and he tumbled to the ground with a heavy thud, groaning as he struggled to sit up.

"Karla, are you—" Robin's words were cut short as the air thickened with tension.

Karla dashed to his side, her heart still racing. "I'm fine! Are you okay?" she asked, her voice laced with concern as she helped him to his feet.

"Yeah, yeah. Just a little winded," Robin replied with a weak grin, brushing dirt off his clothes. His gaze shifted to the battlefield, where all three fallen Skivoks now lay motionless. "You got that last one in style. Nice move."

Karla let out a shaky breath, her body trembling from the exertion. "Thanks... you did..." Her voice trailed off, and her knees buckled as exhaustion finally overtook her. She collapsed to the ground, unable to fight the toll her magic had taken on her.

Robin lunged forward just in time to catch her. "Karla! Damn it, don't give up now," he muttered, his voice thick with worry. With what little strength he had left, he dragged her limp body to the outer wall of their cave, leaning her gently against the stone.

He glanced toward Edith, still unconscious and pale, her breathing faint but steady. Gritting his teeth, Robin stumbled over and hoisted her as well, groaning under her weight. He dragged her beside Karla, leaning her against the same wall. His body screamed in protest, but he pushed through, ensuring both of them were as safe as he could make them.

Once they were secure, Robin slumped to the ground, his vision swimming. The adrenaline that had fueled him throughout the battle was gone, leaving only bone-deep exhaustion. He took one last look at the two girls, his chest heaving as he forced himself to stay conscious for just a moment longer.

"The rest is... up to you guys," he murmured, his voice barely audible. Then, his body gave out, and he collapsed beside them.