

ShadowBound 171

Chapter 171: Liam And Lucian Vs The Malgath 2

The Dark Knight Academy, the grand observation dome.

"I can't believe he's being this stupid now of all times," Galen said with a bored expression, lazily propped up on his elbow as he watched Liam and Lucian battle the Malgath on the magical screens.

"Huh? What do you mean?" Magnus asked, his words muffled as he shoveled an alarming amount of popcorn into his mouth, his focus divided between the fight and the snack.

"He's doing something I've seen him do before," Galen replied, voice laced with disdain. "He's underestimating the Malgath."

"So?" Magnus raised a brow, not entirely sure where the problem lay. "What's wrong with that?"

Mystica giggled softly, a knowing gleam in her purple eyes. "Oh, I see it now," she said in her trademark mischievous tone, tapping her chin as though she'd unraveled a grand mystery.

Magnus paused mid-bite, glaring at her. "What are you two seeing that I can't? Spill it out, dammit." His mock anger only made Mystica's grin widen.

"Magpie," Mystica began sweetly, "let me enlighten you. After surviving a fight with opponents far stronger than himself, my dear Liam seems to have forgotten that luck—not brilliance—kept him alive. Now, in his mind, surviving that battle means that any opponent below that level is automatically weaker than him. Hence, he looks down on them." She ended her explanation with a sly smile, her gaze never leaving the screen.

Magnus squinted as if processing her words took monumental effort. "Oh, I see it now. Actually... I don't. But I get what you're saying." He waved her off like her explanation was an overly long weather report. "Anyway, he'll figure it out and fight properly, so who cares?"

Mystica chuckled, while Galen groaned as if pained by Magnus' lack of foresight.

"But," Magnus continued, shoving more popcorn into his mouth, "I do wonder where the kid learned to look down on people?" He spoke the question like some profound philosophical query.

The silence that followed was deafening, almost theatrical, as all eyes subtly shifted to Galen.

Galen cracked an eye open, his bored expression unmoving. "Don't compare me to a kid who can't even get his brain to work right. Besides," he added with a smug smile, leaning back into his seat, "I don't look down on anyone. Everyone just looks up to me."

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Lucian stood firm as roots and chunks of earth spiraled into the air around him, his magic shaping the forest into a relentless arsenal. Stone pillars shot forth from the ground, jagged and swift, while massive roots surged like whips, aiming to drive the Malgath deeper into the forest.

Liam darted between these earth-shattering attacks, using Lucian's efforts as cover. His daggers flashed like streaks of silver as he delivered rapid slashes to the Malgath's limbs and torso, trying to keep the demon occupied while simultaneously channeling his myst into his palm. A small, flickering orb of fire danced in his hand, slowly compressing as he poured more myst into it, aiming for the Malgath's core.

The Malgath, however, was done toying with them. Its monstrous frame tensed, glowing veins of white flames igniting across its blackened skin. A guttural growl rumbled from its throat before it moved—a blur of power and ferocity.

It swatted away Lucian's stone pillars with a single swipe of its massive arm, the force shattering the rock into harmless rubble. When the roots lashed at it, the Malgath's claws slashed through them with ease, leaving splinters raining down like ash.

Liam, still compressing his Flame Orb, advanced cautiously, his strikes calculated. He leaped forward, aiming to carve into the Malgath's arm, but the demon suddenly spun. Its massive tail swept across the ground like a wrecking ball, forcing Liam to backflip mid-air to avoid being crushed.

The Malgath immediately followed up, raising both arms and slamming them into the ground with a thunderous quake, sending a wave of white flames rippling outward. Lucian raised a wall of stone to shield himself, but it wasn't enough. The flames seared through the barrier and slammed into him, sending him flying like a ragdoll.

"Lucian!" Liam shouted, but his moment of distraction was costly. The Malgath turned its attention fully to him.

Its speed was terrifying. Before Liam could react, the demon lunged forward, its massive fist barreling toward him. He barely brought up his daggers in time to block, the impact forcing him backward as his boots dug trenches into the forest floor.

The Malgath didn't relent. A clawed hand came next, slashing at him with brutal precision. Liam twisted his body, dodging narrowly, but the Malgath's horned head followed, attempting to gore him.

Liam ducked, rolling to the side, but the demon's tail came crashing down like a whip. He raised his daggers in a cross to block, but the sheer force sent him skidding across the ground, his feet kicking up dirt and leaves. The Malgath gave him no time to recover, charging forward with another barrage of attacks.

Fists rained down like hammers, the ground shattering with every missed punch. Liam's movements were sharp but desperate—each dodge, each deflection with his daggers was more strained than the last.

He darted between trees for cover, but the Malgath's punches obliterated them in single blows, sending splinters and bark flying everywhere. A particularly brutal swipe caught Liam mid-dodge, sending him crashing into a thick oak tree. He felt the air leave his lungs as the impact splintered the trunk behind him.

He tried to retaliate, slashing upward with his dagger as the Malgath loomed over him. The blade barely grazed its skin before the demon retaliated with a devastating backhand.

Liam flew through the air like a broken doll, crashing into the ground and rolling violently before coming to a stop in a shallow crater. Blood trickled from a cut on his forehead, and his shoulders burned with pain from the gashes tearing through his skin.

'Why can't I do anything against this bastard?' Liam thought bitterly as he pushed himself to his knees, gasping for air. His vision blurred, the heat of the Malgath's white flames distorting the forest around him. 'I fought two Blood Demons and survived... so why am I so helpless now?'

The ground shook as the Malgath approached, its heavy steps echoing through the forest. It raised its fist high, ready to deliver a crushing blow to Liam's face.

Liam instinctively raised his daggers in defense. Time seemed to slow as the Malgath's punch came down with terrifying force. In that moment, as the weight of the demon's power bore down on him, clarity struck.

'Oh, I see it now,' Liam thought.

Time snapped back into motion. The Malgath's fist connected with Liam's crossed daggers, but the sheer force was unstoppable. Despite his attempt to minimize the damage, the impact sent him rocketing through the forest.

He smashed through tree after tree, the splintered remains collapsing around him, before finally skidding across the dirt and coming to a stop at the base of a massive oak.

He groaned, his head pounding as blood dripped from the wound above his brow, with cuts lining his arms and torso.

'How foolish and naive did I get after that fight?' Liam questioned himself as his barely-opened eyes stared at the twin moons in the sky, their pale light casting an ethereal glow across the forest.

'To think I would be influenced by barely coming out of that fight alive, and think I had the right to underestimate my opponent. How idiotic,' he mused, his face remaining stoic even as his body throbbed with pain. The moonlight illuminated his bloodied form, an eerie calm overtaking him amidst the chaos.

'But I'm glad I figured this out myself,' Liam thought. 'Those Blood Demons back then... they weren't intent on killing outright. They played with their prey, finding amusement in the fight. But this demon... this Malgath...'

He closed his eyes briefly, the heavy footsteps of the Malgath drawing nearer.

'This thing is different. Despite its sense of reasoning—primitive compared to the Blood Demons—its sole purpose is to kill. There's no amusement, no holding back. Just unrelenting, merciless intent.' His lips tightened into a grim line. 'And yet I was stupid enough to think highly of myself, to believe I didn't need to go all out. Such arrogance... Such bullshit.'

His eyes opened fully now, their red hue glinting like embers in the moonlight. 'I feel disgusted by myself,' he admitted silently. The footsteps stopped, the shadow of the Malgath looming over him.

The creature towered above, its form lit by the twin moons. It grinned down at him, its faceless head emanating a sense of glee that Liam could feel despite the lack of eyes.

Liam's stomach churned, and though his expression remained impassive, a flicker of nausea tugged at his resolve. This thing wasn't just fighting him—it was enjoying every moment of his suffering.

The Malgath raised its massive foot, the claws curling as it prepared to stomp down and crush Liam's head.

'Now I know what to do and how to do it,' Liam thought, 'I'm killing this thing, even if I have to burn this whole forest down with it.'

The creature's foot descended like a falling meteor, colliding with the ground in a deafening quake that sent shockwaves tearing through the clearing. Dirt and debris exploded outward, obscuring the area in a swirling cloud of dust. The Malgath tilted its head back, releasing a sound that could only be described as a guttural laugh.

But as the debris settled, its laughter stopped abruptly. The ground beneath its foot was bare. Liam's body wasn't there.

The Malgath tilted its head in irritation, its claws flexing as it scanned for Liam. It had barely begun to react when a fierce kick struck the underside of its jaw. The strike was swift, precise, and brutal, flames

erupting from Liam's foot as it connected. The combined force of the blow and the explosion sent the demon hurtling through the air, crashing into a massive tree that splintered on impact.

Smoke curled from the Malgath's jaw as it slowly rose to its feet, its movements jerky. With a guttural snarl, it reached up and forcefully adjusted its dislocated jaw, the bone snapping back into place with a crack. Its faceless head turned in the direction it had been kicked from.

There stood Liam, battered and bloodied but unbroken. His stance was unwavering, his form straight. In his left hand, he held his dagger, while flames flickered at his feet.

"Now come at me like your life depends on it."