

ShadowBound 241

Chapter 241: Refusal Of Death

The shift was instant.

One moment, the Berserker Demon stood there, steam rising from its armored body, its red eyes glowing like hellfire. The next—

It vanished.

Chris barely had time to blink before a thunderous impact exploded against his chest. A bone-spiked fist crashed into him with the force of a collapsing mountain, the shockwave alone sending out a violent gust of wind. His body rocketed backward, smashing through trees like they were made of paper. Blood sprayed from his mouth before he even hit the ground, his body tumbling like a ragdoll before crashing against a jagged boulder with a sickening crack.

"As—!!" Sheila's scream was cut short.

The demon was on her.

Before she could raise her sword, a bladed protrusion slammed into her stomach, impaling her through sheer brute force. Her breath hitched, blood dripping from her lips as the bone spike lifted her off the ground like a skewered doll. Her fingers twitched, struggling to form a spell, but the demon didn't give her the chance.

It ripped its arm back.

Sheila flew through the air, crashing into the mud, a thick red trail smearing the earth as she tumbled.

Asher saw red.

Flames erupted around him in an inferno, his rage pushing his power to the brink. "YOU BASTARD—!!" He launched forward, blue fire swirling around his fists. His speed was blinding, his punches like meteors. He struck out—

And hit nothing but air.

The demon was gone.

Then—

BAM!

An unseen force slammed into his side. Ribs snapped. The world blurred as his body twisted midair before another brutal impact struck him from above, smashing him into the ground. The earth caved beneath the force, a deep crater forming as Asher's body convulsed from the sheer brutality of the attack.

Liam was the only one left standing.

His instincts screamed at him to move, but—

Too late.

A massive clawed hand wrapped around his head in a bone-crushing grip. He barely registered what was happening before he was lifted and slammed face-first into the ground.

Then again.

And again.

And again.

Each impact shattered the earth beneath him, sending dirt and stone flying in all directions. Blood splattered across the ground, staining it deep crimson. The world spun, pain lancing through his skull as the demon threw him aside like trash, his body tumbling across the battlefield.

Silence fell.

The four lay sprawled across the shattered terrain, bloodied, broken, barely moving.

Chris wheezed, his chest caved in, bones jutting at unnatural angles. His fingers twitched, lightning flickering weakly before fading.

Sheila coughed, blood pooling beneath her as she clutched her side, her ice magic struggling to close the wound fast enough.

Asher groaned, his body refusing to move, flames sputtering out as the pain overwhelmed him.

Liam lay still, his vision spinning, his breathing ragged. He forced himself to move, his fingers curling into the dirt. He could feel warm blood dripping down his face, one of his eyes barely able to open.

The Berserker Demon stood in the center of the battlefield, unscathed.

Its transformation had made it something else. Something far beyond what they were prepared for.

This wasn't a battle anymore.

It was a massacre.

Liam forced himself to his feet, preparing an attack but before he could do anything, his breath hitched.

A cold, piercing pain rooted him to the spot.

His sword clattered to the ground, flames flickering out as his fingers lost all strength. His mind struggled to process what had happened. One moment, he was preparing to attack, fire roaring at the edges of his blade—

The next—

The demon was right in front of him.

And a bone spike was buried deep in the center of his chest.

The pain was unreal. It wasn't a clean stab—it was jagged, serrated, its rough texture grinding against his ribs and tearing through muscle. Every slight movement sent white-hot agony searing through his body.

His lungs refused to draw breath.

Blood welled up in his throat, thick and suffocating, dribbling past his lips in sluggish streams. His vision wavered, dark spots creeping in at the edges. The strength in his legs faltered, knees trembling. He barely noticed as his hands instinctively grasped at the bone protruding from his chest, fingers slick with his own blood.

The Berserker Demon loomed over him, its skeletal armor gleaming under the dim light. Its red eyes bored into him, devoid of emotion, yet filled with a raw, primal hunger.

A sickening crack sounded as the demon twisted the bone spike inside him.

Liam's body convulsed. A choked gasp escaped his lips as his nerves screamed. The jagged edges scraped against his ribcage, pushing deeper, puncturing something vital.

More blood bubbled up from his throat. His breaths came in short, sharp gasps—shallow. His heart pounded, weak and erratic, as his body fought to keep going.

But he was losing.

His vision blurred. The world around him tilted.

His knees finally gave out.

The demon ripped the bone spike free in one brutal motion, tearing through flesh as it did. Blood gushed from the gaping wound, spilling down his chest in thick, crimson streams.

Liam collapsed onto his knees, barely conscious. His fingers weakly pressed against his chest, as if trying to hold himself together, to stop the life from leaving his body.

His strength—his fire—his myst—

All of it was slipping away.

The last thing he saw was the Berserker Demon raising its clawed hand, preparing to finish him off for good.

Then—

Darkness.

Liam plummeted through an abyss of endless black. No light, no sound, no sense of time—only an overwhelming void that swallowed everything. Yet, even as he fell, his expression remained vacant, his mind eerily calm.

So this is it, huh? He thought, unfazed. At least it's over. Hope everyone dies quickly so this damn simulation ends already.

He let the darkness take him, surrendering to the weightlessness. But after what felt like an eternity, a creeping realization settled in—he wasn't waking up.

He wasn't being transported back to the academy.

The simulation was supposed to eject participants the moment they "died," leaving behind only a holographic corpse on the battlefield. But that wasn't happening.

What the hell? I should be back by now.

The silence pressed in, growing unbearably loud, suffocating. Then—

Ba-dump.

A heartbeat.

Liam barely reacted at first. Of course, his heart should still be beating in reality. But this—this felt different.

Ba-dump. Ba-dump.

The sound grew louder, hammering against his chest like war drums. A sharp, sudden pain lanced through him, making him clutch at his ribcage. His pulse quickened, a deep, primal instinct roaring to life inside him.

"For f*ck's sake... can't this just be over already?" he muttered, irritation creeping into his voice.

But before he could process the strangeness of it all, his mind suddenly fractured.

Memories surged forth like a tidal wave, flooding his consciousness.

He saw himself standing at the precipice of death over and over again—

His first brush with the reaper in the Forest of Kyrell, lungs burning, limbs trembling.

His brutal duel with Jamak, where he barely crawled away with his life.

The first time he faced a demon, the raw terror and the desperate struggle.

The battle against Nyxie, before she became his.

The Blood Demons—relentless, merciless—dragging him closer and closer to the abyss, only for the door to death to remain shut.

Every moment his body had fought, clawing at survival with bloody hands, refusing to cross that threshold.

And suddenly, Liam understood.

His body knew what true death felt like.

And no matter how real the academy had crafted this simulation, no matter how flawless its illusions—his instincts rejected it.

His mind, his very being, refused to accept this as his end.

The system had been disrupted. He wasn't returning because, deep down, his body knew he wasn't supposed to die here.

A smirk curled at his lips.

"Tch. So that's how it is, huh?" He exhaled, amusement flickering in his crimson eyes. "Not willing to go out in such a pathetic way?"

The void trembled around him.

His heartbeat thundered.

Liam rolled his shoulders, tilting his head with a dark chuckle.

"Well then... let's finish this joke."

The abyss cracked.

"And after that... maybe I'll finally get some damn rest."