

ShadowBound 32

Chapter 32: Burn It Out

Liam burst forward like a crimson comet, his speed multiplied tenfold in the Flare Burst state. The air crackled with intensity as he closed the distance between himself and the demon in the blink of an eye.

Every step he took left scorched imprints on the ground, the sheer heat radiating from his body warping the air around him. He was a blur, moving faster than the eye could track.

The demon barely had time to react as Liam appeared in front of it, his daggers slashing in rapid succession. Each strike was precise, aiming for the demon's elongated limbs.

Liam's blades, infused with the crimson energy of the Flare Burst, hummed as they cut through the air, their edges leaving faint trails of light.

The demon snarled, swinging its clawed hands toward him, but Liam's reflexes were heightened—almost supernatural. He ducked, sidestepped, and twisted around every attack with fluid grace.

With a burst of movement, he delivered a decisive strike, severing one of the demon's limbs cleanly at the joint.

Dark, ichor-like blood spurted from the wound, and the severed arm fell to the ground with a heavy thud. The demon howled in agony, but Liam didn't let up. He knew he had to keep pressing the attack.

Another flurry of strikes, and the second limb was severed, then the third. Each time, Liam moved with lethal precision, his attacks blending seamlessly into one another, a deadly dance of blades and speed.

The demon staggered back, its grotesque form looking weaker with each limb it lost. For a brief moment, Liam felt a flicker of hope—perhaps this fight was ending in his favor after all.

But just as quickly as that hope sparked, it was extinguished.

The demon's body convulsed, and before Liam's eyes, the severed limbs began to writhe and grow.

In mere seconds, the limbs regrew, sinew and bone twisting and snapping back into place with sickening cracks.

The claws, longer and sharper than before, extended from the freshly regenerated arms.

Liam's eyes widened. "You've got to be kidding me," he muttered, taking a step back. His mind raced as he watched the demon flex its newly formed limbs, its aura growing even more intense.

He could sense it—a malicious energy coursing through the creature, its regeneration fueled by something dark and insidious.

The demon launched itself at him again, its speed matching Liam's own now, as if feeding off his intensity. Liam parried with his daggers, blocking one claw swipe, then another, but each impact sent tremors up his arms.

He was running out of time. He could feel the strain building in his muscles, the burning in his lungs intensifying as the Flare Burst state began to take its toll. Every breath felt hotter, searing his throat, his heart pounding with a furious rhythm.

Liam attempted another series of strikes, aiming for the demon's legs this time, hoping to immobilize it.

His blades cut deep, severing both limbs in one swift motion, but no sooner had they hit the ground than the demon's legs began to regrow, the wounds closing in an instant.

It was relentless, unstoppable, and Liam could feel the odds tilting against him.

Sweat dripped down his brow, mingling with the blood splattered across his face, his breaths coming in ragged gasps. The crimson aura around him flickered, dimming slightly.

"Damn it," he hissed, knowing the Flare Burst was reaching its limits. His vision blurred for a moment, the exhaustion creeping in.

The demon sensed his weakening state and lunged again, this time with even greater ferocity. Liam barely managed to block its claws with his daggers, but the force pushed him back, sliding him across the dirt.

He dug his heels in, fighting to stay upright, but he could feel his energy waning, the last embers of the Flare Burst state threatening to burn out.

Liam gritted his teeth, his grip tightening around his daggers as he stared down the demon. Its glowing eyes bore into him, taunting, as if it knew he was on the verge of collapse.

He had gambled everything on this fight, and now, standing on the edge of defeat, Liam knew one thing for certain:

If he didn't find a way to end this soon, the demon would devour him whole.

Liam staggered backward, putting some distance between himself and the demon, frustration bubbling up from within.

"Damn it!" he growled, feeling the strain of the Flare Burst reaching its absolute limit, the crimson aura around him flickering like a dying flame.

"There's no way I'm losing. Not here. Not now," he muttered, clenching his daggers tighter.

The memory of every battle, every struggle he'd faced, flashed through his mind. All the pain, the sacrifices—it couldn't end here, not after he'd come this far.

Forcing himself upright despite the searing pain coursing through his body, Liam locked eyes with the demon.

Every muscle screamed in protest, but his resolve only hardened. "I will defeat you," he declared, his voice cold, eyes burning with an unyielding fire.

He knew he was pushing beyond his limits. The Flare Burst was never meant to be sustained this long, but it didn't matter now.

If this demon could regenerate endlessly, then he'd have to go straight for its core or sever its head— whichever came first. There was no room for hesitation.

Liam launched himself forward, his body moving faster than ever, every ounce of power channeled into this final assault.

His vision blurred at the edges, but he stayed focused, ignoring the pain, the fatigue, everything but his target.

The demon met his charge with a feral snarl, its claws stretched out, aiming to rip him apart.

But Liam was ready. He twisted his body mid-air, dodging the attack with a fluid grace, his dagger deflecting the claws in a shower of sparks. Using the momentum, he latched onto the demon's arm, pulling himself closer.

In one swift, precise motion, Liam drove his first dagger deep into the demon's chest, aiming for where he believed its core resided.

With the same fluidity, he brought his second dagger up in a brutal arc, slicing clean through the demon's neck. The blade cut effortlessly, severing its head in one clean strike.

Liam landed on the ground, panting heavily as the demon's decapitated head tumbled from its shoulders, its body collapsing in a lifeless heap beside him. Silence fell, save for the ragged sound of Liam's breathing.

He had done it. The fight was over. But as the adrenaline ebbed away, exhaustion hit him like a tidal wave.

His knees buckled, and he fell to the ground, his daggers slipping from his grasp.

As Liam collapsed to the ground, a new, unfamiliar agony surged through his body. This pain wasn't from the exhaustion of using Flare Burst; it was something far more sinister.

Gritting his teeth, he forced himself to glance down at his chest, where he noticed three deep, diagonal cuts.

From each wound, dark veins began to spread, twisting and curling beneath his skin. The realization struck him—the demon had managed one final blow, injecting its deadly poison before falling.

Gasping for breath, Liam felt the venom coursing through his veins, a burning, searing pain that threatened to overwhelm him. His fingers dug into the dirt as his vision began to blur, darkness creeping in from the edges.

"Is this really how it ends?" he thought, fury and disbelief swirling in his mind. "After everything I've fought for?"

"No... I refuse to die here!"

Summoning every last ounce of his strength, Liam forced himself back into Flare Burst.

He knew his body was already pushed beyond its limits, but desperation drove him forward. If he couldn't expel the poison with healing, he would incinerate it.

The pain was indescribable, as if his very blood had ignited, flames searing through every muscle and nerve.

He could feel his insides burning, his heart pounding erratically, but he refused to let go. He endured, focusing on one thought—burn it all away.

Smoke began to rise from his wounds, wisps of black mist escaping as the poison fought against the fiery myst raging within him. Slowly, painfully, the dark veins receded, consumed by the intensity of Flare Burst.

But the toll was heavy. Liam's vision darkened, blood trickling from the corners of his eyes.

Every beat of his heart sent waves of agony crashing through him, his consciousness slipping further with each pulse.

Finally, as the last trace of the poison was eradicated, his body gave in. The Flare Burst faded, and the world around him went silent.

Liam's body slumped to the ground, unconscious, yet victorious in his final act of defiance.

Even in the depths of darkness, he had found the strength to fight back. And for now, that was enough.

As the first light of dawn crept over the horizon, Liam stirred, his body aching with every movement. He groaned, forcing himself upright despite the exhaustion that weighed him down.

Every muscle screamed in protest, and the burns from Flare Burst still tingled under his skin. He took a deep breath, steadying himself, then let his daggers dissolve back into the shadows, slipping away like mist.

Liam stumbled forward, each step heavier than the last, but he kept moving. He had one goal left—the very reason he had endured this nightmare—the Emberflower. Its fiery glow flickered in the distance, just within reach.

Liam extended a trembling hand and plucked a single flower from its stem, feeling the warmth of its petals against his fingers. A weary smile tugged at his lips.

"This better be worth it," he muttered under his breath, clutching the Emberflower against his chest.

As he turned to face the demon's lifeless corpse, a thought crossed his mind—could he perform Extraction on something so powerful?

It was a gamble, and in his weakened state, the odds were against him, but the potential was too tempting to ignore.

Summoning what little strength he had left, Liam stretched out his hand over the demon's remains.

"Extract," he commanded, his voice barely above a whisper. But nothing happened. He tried again, pouring more of his dwindling myst into the attempt, but still, there was no response.

Frustration welled up, but he knew he had reached his limit. He couldn't afford to waste any more time or energy.

With a resigned sigh, Liam released the effort and called forth his shadow beast. It emerged silently, its dark form shifting and solidifying before him. The beast's glowing eyes seemed to widen, taking in Liam's battered state.

Without a word, the creature knelt down, offering its back. Liam managed a tired chuckle as he climbed on, draping himself over the shadow beast's shoulders. "Looks like you've started to feel human emotions as well," he muttered, feeling the beast's muscles tense beneath him.

"Just get me back before the sun's up," he murmured, resting his head against the beast's neck, his eyes heavy with fatigue.

The shadow beast nodded in understanding and set off, moving swiftly and silently across the landscape. Liam's vision blurred, the world around him fading in and out as they traveled.

But he held onto the Emberflower, its warmth reminding him of his victory, and the strength that had carried him through the darkness.

As they made their way back to the city, Liam closed his eyes, letting the rhythm of the beast's movements lull him into a restless sleep, knowing that, for now, he had survived.