

ShadowBound 40

Chapter 40: The Realm Of Beasts

The students suddenly found themselves deep within a dense, untamed forest, its towering trees stretching endlessly toward the sky.

The thick canopy overhead allowed only slivers of light to filter through, casting the entire realm in an eerie, shadowy glow.

Rather than appearing together, the students had been scattered across the vast wilderness, separated into small groups at random.

Each cluster found themselves in different parts of the forest, some near hidden streams, others in shadowed clearings, and a few on the edges of jagged cliffs.

The atmosphere was thick with tension, the air heavy with the unknown dangers lurking just beyond the trees.

The Realm of Beasts had already begun its test.

At one of the scattered locations, Dylan found himself surrounded by unfamiliar faces. He glanced around, trying to spot Liam, but quickly realized his friend was nowhere to be found.

"Great, looks like I'll have to make new friends," Dylan muttered with a light chuckle. As he mingled with the group, it became clear that the others weren't exactly friendly.

They ignored him, their faces hard and focused, as if they were sizing up both the environment and each other.

Dylan, however, remained unbothered, his trademark grin still plastered on his face.

"Well, aren't they a lively bunch?" he murmured to himself, weaving between the more serious students as they decided to press further into the forest.

The air grew heavy as they ventured deeper, the thick foliage rustling ominously. The growl that followed sent shivers down their spines.

Something was moving swiftly through the shadows, too quick for them to catch a glimpse, but it was clear whatever it was... it wasn't friendly.

Out of nowhere, a massive beast exploded from the underbrush. It was enormous, a muscular, tiger-like creature with orange and black stripes, fangs protruding from its snarling mouth, and a long, thick tail that whipped menacingly through the air.

Its feral eyes locked onto the students as it leaped towards them, jaws wide, ready to tear into flesh.

Panic surged through the group, but before anyone could react, a flash of blue flames erupted from the side, slamming into the beast mid-air with a deafening explosion.

The impact sent the creature crashing through a nearby boulder and toppling trees in its wake.

The beast staggered back to its feet, enraged and more dangerous than before. The students, wide-eyed and shocked, turned to see who had saved them.

Standing confidently was a striking figure, a boy with a sharp, handsome face, white hair styled in a side fade, and piercing blue eyes that seemed to glow with intensity.

His sword was drawn, the tip dragging along the ground as he stepped forward.

"If you're all just going to stand there like scared rabbits waiting to be eaten, then at least have the decency to stay out of my way," the boy said, his voice dripping with disdain. His tone was cold, cutting through the tension with brutal honesty.

Dylan raised an eyebrow, clearly entertained by the boy's cocky attitude, but said nothing, watching as the newcomer approached the beast, unfazed by the threat.

The tiger-like creature growled, preparing to strike again, but then something unexpected happened.

From the shadows behind it, several more beasts of the same kind emerged, their glowing eyes fixed on the group. There were at least four now, all circling, ready to pounce.

The boy stopped in his tracks, but instead of fear, his expression shifted into something darker. His lips curled into a menacing grin, almost as if he welcomed the challenge.

"Now that's more like it," he said, his voice dripping with excitement. With a swift motion, he raised his sword, and blue flames erupted from the blade, engulfing it in searing heat.

The beasts snarled, but the boy didn't hesitate. His entire aura shifted, the air around him crackling with the heat of his myst as he prepared to face the pack head-on.

As the lead beast lunged at the boy, he wasted no time and launched himself forward to meet it head-on.

The creature's massive claws slashed down, but the boy's blade flashed, expertly redirecting the blow. In the same fluid motion, he raised his free hand, which was engulfed in roaring blue flames.

The heat radiating from him was almost unbearable, wild and untamed.

In a split second, his flaming hand found its mark on the beast's side, and with a deafening roar, an explosion far more intense than the first erupted.

The sheer force of it incinerated a section of the forest, trees snapping and splintering as the ground itself seemed to shake. Blue flames spread, devouring everything in their path as the beast was thrown back, engulfed in fire.

The boy landed on his feet, his smirk growing wider as he surveyed the destruction he'd caused.

But he wasn't aware of the danger creeping up behind him. One of the remaining beasts had used the explosion as cover, silently closing the distance.

Without warning, the creature pounced from behind, its claws aimed directly at the boy's back.

He spun just in time, his sword flashing as it intercepted the strike, but the force was overwhelming. He was knocked back, skidding across the ground, dirt and debris kicking up in his wake.

He managed to dig his sword into the earth, grinding to a halt just before slamming into a tree.

The moment he stopped, another beast lunged from the side, giving him no time to react. His eyes widened for a split second, realizing he wouldn't be able to block in time.

But then, a familiar voice rang out from above. "Sorry, Blue Flames, but I can't let you hog all the glory!"

Dylan, grinning like a madman, was airborne, bow in hand. Though no arrow was visible, his hand was already pulling the string back.

Myst swirled around his arm, coalescing into a sleek, metallic arrow. As the bowstring stretched to its limit, the tip of the arrow gleamed with a bright yellow light, pulsing with energy.

With a sharp twang, Dylan released the arrow. It streaked through the air like a lightning bolt, aimed directly at the attacking beast.

The arrow struck the creature with a blinding flash of light, the force of the impact sending it crashing into the ground, where it erupted in a powerful explosion of myst and energy.

The boy with blue flames raised an eyebrow, momentarily impressed despite himself. As the dust settled and the remains of the beast smoldered on the ground, Dylan landed next to him, still wearing that cocky grin.

"You're welcome," Dylan said, casually spinning his bow before slinging it over his shoulder.

The boy smirked, his blue eyes flashing with both irritation and amusement. "Not bad, but you're still playing catch-up."

Dylan shrugged. "Catch-up? Please. I'm just getting warmed up. I'll leave the rest for you, if you're still standing by the time I'm done."

The two exchanged a quick glance, a silent understanding passing between them as more of the beasts closed in from the shadows. The fight was far from over, but now, they were both ready to unleash hell.

Back at the academy grounds, Galen and Mystica observed the trials unfold through the magical screen Mystica had summoned.

The screen flickered, displaying various scenes from the Realm of Beasts where the students were being tested.

Mystica leaned back, her eyes gleaming with amusement. "Seems these kids are stronger than you expected, Galen," she teased, her lips curving into a mischievous smile as she watched the battles unfold.

Galen, his arms crossed and expression as cold as ever, scoffed. "Stronger? You're easily entertained. These kids are still nothing but trash pretending to be knights." His gaze shifted to the group of students who had already been forcefully returned by Mystica's spell.

These unfortunate students, who got injured back at the forest, bloodied and bruised, stood at the academy grounds, their heads hung low in shame.

Galen's icy glare fell on them, making them avert their eyes even further. "Look at them," he muttered. "Already failed. Disgraceful." He sighed deeply, the disdain evident in his voice.

Meanwhile, in another part of the Realm of Beasts, a different group of students, still intact and unscathed, trudged through the dense forest. They had yet to encounter any beasts, and an uneasy quiet hung over them.

"Did you hear that?" one girl asked, her voice trembling slightly as they all heard a distant, thunderous boom.

"Look over there!" another student pointed toward the horizon where a massive explosion of blue flames lit up the sky.

"Do you think it's a beast?" a nervous girl asked.

"It could be," a boy replied, "or it could be one of our classmates."

Before anyone could continue speculating, a tall, well-built guy who looked far older than the rest stepped forward.

His muscles bulged beneath his shirt, and his stern expression demanded attention. "It doesn't matter what it is," he said in a commanding tone. "We're heading in that direction."

Silence fell over the group as they stared at him. His presence was intimidating, and most seemed hesitant to challenge him. But after a few seconds, one girl gathered the courage to speak.

"I understand that you've pretty much made yourself the leader here," she began cautiously, "but I think we should vote on it. We don't know what that explosion was, and running toward it without a plan could get us all killed."

A few other students murmured in agreement, clearly siding with her.

The muscular guy sneered.

"Pathetic. You all really want to vote? Did you not hear Sir Galen back at the academy? This trial is meant to test our combat skills. Sitting around waiting for the trial to end won't make you a knight."

"True," the girl retorted, her voice calm but firm. "But he also said it's about survival and how we handle bizarre situations. Running toward explosions blindly isn't surviving—it's being reckless."

The group now split into two sides: one that wanted to follow the muscular guy toward the explosion, and the other who agreed with the girl, preferring to stay where they were and wait out the trial. The trial was only supposed to last three hours, and by their estimates, they had already survived one.

"Enough," the guy barked, cutting through the chatter.

"We'll settle this with a vote. Whoever wants to follow me, stand with me. If you want to hide like cowards, stand with her. Once we've voted, we all stick to the decision."

One by one, the students made their choices, moving to either his side or the girl's. When the last person had chosen, both sides were tied, leaving only one person who hadn't voted—Liam.

Liam, who had been silent the entire time, stood off to the side, watching the debate unfold with quiet indifference.

His mind wasn't on their petty argument; it was on more important things—his own strategies, his own goals. All this talk about running or hiding meant nothing to him.

"Hey! You!" The muscular guy's voice rang out, clearly frustrated by Liam's lack of participation. "What's your vote? Make it quick."

Liam's gaze slowly shifted toward the guy, his eyes locking onto him. The intensity of Liam's stare was enough to make the muscular student falter.

Despite his imposing size, a chill ran down his spine, and for the first time, he seemed uncertain.

The silence stretched on for a moment as Liam continued to look at him, unblinking. Then, with a calm but cutting tone, Liam spoke. "I don't care about your vote. Do what you want. I have better things to think of."

The tension in the air thickened as the group exchanged glances, unsure of how to respond to Liam's disregard for their plans.