

ShadowBound 41

Chapter 41: Growing My Army

The muscular guy's patience finally snapped, his frustration boiling over. He stormed toward Liam, eyes blazing with anger, and grabbed him by the collar, lifting him slightly off the ground.

He was much taller and broader than Liam, his shadow towering over him.

"You think you're some kind of hotshot, don't you?" the guy spat, his voice trembling with annoyance. His grip tightened on Liam's shirt, but Liam remained unbothered, his expression eerily calm.

His gaze shifted down to the hand gripping his collar before slowly locking eyes with the guy, his stare cold and unflinching.

"I'll say this once," Liam spoke softly, yet with a quiet authority that made the air around them feel heavier. "Let. Go. Of me."

The guy chuckled, finding Liam's calm demeanor amusing. "And what if I don't? What are you gonna do, huh?" he mocked.

"Gonna hit me with some special fist combo?" He laughed loudly, turning to the rest of the group while still holding Liam's collar.

"Can you believe this guy?" he asked, gesturing to Liam with his free hand. "He doesn't even have a weapon, and he's trying to act tough!"

He laughed harder, the sound echoing through the forest. "You wanna be feared, kid? You gotta back it up with action. You should be a comedian instead of pretending to be a knight."

Before he could finish his sentence, Liam moved with blinding speed, his hand snapping up to grab the guy's wrist. Instantly, the guy's laughter stopped, replaced by a sharp gasp of pain.

His knees buckled, and he began to drop, slowly collapsing at Liam's feet as the unbearable pressure in his wrist forced him down.

The pain etched across his face was undeniable, and the sounds of his struggle filled the tense silence.

Liam, still calm and composed, looked down at him. "Like I said," Liam's voice cut through the air, "I don't care what you decide. Just don't get in my way."

The rest of the group stood frozen, watching in shock as the once-dominant figure crumbled before Liam's effortless grip. No one dared to intervene or even speak.

Liam released the guy's wrist, letting him fall completely to the ground. The muscular student clutched his arm, grimacing in pain but too afraid to stand up again.

Liam's gaze shifted, landing on a girl who had been standing near a tree, her face pale from witnessing what had just happened.

"And you," Liam said, his tone neutral but sharp, "should be more aware of your surroundings. Don't just stand anywhere without paying attention."

Without warning, Liam summoned one of his daggers into his left hand. The black blade shimmered as it materialized from his myst, leaving the group wide-eyed in fear, thinking Liam was about to attack.

His hand moved like a blur, the dagger flying from his grip at incredible speed.

The dagger sliced through the air, whistling past the side of the girl's face so closely she could feel the wind from its passage.

She gasped, her body freezing in place, too shocked to react.

The blade embedded itself into the tree behind her, but not into the trunk. A strange, purple liquid began to drip from something now becoming visible—a camouflaged beast, blending seamlessly into the bark of the tree.

With the dagger lodged into its head, the creature's body fell, revealing its grotesque form: a bat-like beast with elongated limbs, its wings twisted into clawed arms.

The purple substance was its blood, and Liam's dagger had pierced clean through its skull.

The group stumbled back, startled by the sight of the creature. They hadn't even known it was there.

Liam walked toward the fallen beast, retrieving his dagger without a second glance at the group. As he knelt to wipe the blood from the blade, he glanced at them.

"Whether you plan to stay here or go toward the explosion, it doesn't matter. Just know that beasts are lurking everywhere. You've stepped into the Realm of Beasts, after all."

He turned and began walking deeper into the forest, his steps calm and measured. The group, still paralyzed with fear and uncertainty, watched him go.

But just as Liam reached the edge of the clearing, he stopped, casting a final glance at the corpse of the fallen beast.

"Extract," he whispered, and in a dark swirl of myst, the shadow of the beast was ripped from its body, drawn into Liam's own shadow, disappearing within.

The sight sent a shiver down the spines of those watching, but no one dared speak a word.

With a faint smile, Liam murmured to himself, "Now, time to go hunting. This place is perfect for Extraction."

And without another word, he vanished into the depths of the forest, leaving the group to their fear and confusion, his figure fading into the shadows.

Back at the academy, Galen and Mystica observed the unfolding trials, their eyes fixed on the magical screen that displayed the chaotic events.

The moment Liam's shadow enveloped the beast's corpse and absorbed it, a subtle shift crossed Galen's usually cold and controlled face.

"Mystica," Galen spoke, his voice still calm, though there was an unmistakable edge beneath his words.

"I see it, Galen," Mystica responded, her disbelief barely concealed. "He just used dark magic... and he's a student?"

Galen's lips curled into an almost sinister smirk. "Seems there's still a dark magic user out there," he murmured, his tone dark with curiosity, yet laced with approval. "I thought we'd seen the last of them."

The screen continued to display scenes of students struggling in the trials, some triumphing, others being forcefully teleported back to the academy by Mystica's spell.

Only around a hundred students remained in the trial, but Galen's focus had narrowed on one—Liam.

Deep within the Realm of Beasts, far removed from the rest of the students, Liam ventured alone. His steps were quiet, deliberate, as he navigated the thick foliage. Shadows clung to him, drawn naturally by his presence, as though the forest itself bent toward his power.

His eyes scanned his surroundings, taking in every detail of the wilderness. The thick canopy overhead filtered the sunlight into scattered beams, casting an eerie glow on the forest floor.

The air was dense with myst, heavy and tangible. The deeper he went, the more primal the energy became.

Liam suddenly stopped in his tracks, feeling a shift in the atmosphere—a slight tremor in the air that alerted him to the incoming danger.

His hands moved with fluid precision, summoning his twin daggers. The black blades shimmered, dark myst swirling around them like tendrils of smoke.

From the shadows, beasts began to emerge. They were all different, grotesque in their forms.

The first, a massive creature resembling a wolf but standing on two legs, had thick black fur and glowing red eyes. Its claws were long and sharp, dripping with venom.

Another beast, a twisted abomination with the body of a panther but the head of a serpent, slithered through the grass, its tail lashing out like a whip.

Others followed—a bear-like monster with stone-like skin, a giant lizard with scales that reflected the forest like a mirror, and strange, horned creatures with razor-sharp tusks protruding from their jaws.

They surrounded Liam, their eyes gleaming with hunger and rage, driven by the instinct to kill. But Liam didn't flinch. Instead, a menacing smirk crept onto his lips.

"Thank you for saving me the trouble of hunting you down," he muttered, his voice cold as he crouched slightly, his body preparing to spring into action.

The wolf-like beast charged first, its claws slashing through the air with deadly speed. Liam twisted his body to the side, narrowly avoiding the strike, and in one fluid motion, he plunged his dagger into the creature's exposed side.

The blade sank deep, dark myst surging through the wound, and with a twist, Liam sent the beast flying to the ground, its body convulsing before it lay still.

But there was no time to pause. The panther-serpent hybrid lunged at him next, its forked tongue flicking out with a hiss.

Liam's footwork was precise, swift, as he danced around the beast's attacks. Its tail whipped at him, aiming for his legs, but Liam leaped into the air, spinning mid-flight. His right dagger came down in a deadly arc, severing the tail cleanly.

The creature screeched, recoiling in pain, but Liam was already moving. He landed gracefully, his left dagger flashing out and driving through the creature's throat, ending its life in a single, brutal strike.

Behind him, the ground shook as the stone-skinned bear beast charged. Its massive paws could crush a man's skull with ease, and its roars reverberated through the trees.

Liam waited, poised, and just as the beast reared up to strike, he dashed forward, his body low to the ground.

The beast's paw slammed into the earth where he'd stood a second ago, but Liam was already behind it.

His daggers flashed, slicing through the tendons behind its legs. The beast collapsed, its stone skin no match for the precision of Liam's strikes.

With ruthless efficiency, he drove both daggers into its exposed spine, ending its rampage.

The lizard creature hissed, its mirror-like scales flashing as it moved to attack. It was faster than the others, darting in and out of Liam's range with blinding speed, but Liam's focus remained unshaken.

He waited for the perfect moment, and when the creature lunged again, its jaws wide open to strike, Liam spun on his heel, his movements far fluid and enhanced than months ago.

He slashed both daggers in a cross formation, cutting across the creature's throat and stomach in one swift, lethal motion.

The lizard staggered back, its scales cracking as blood poured from its wounds before it too collapsed.

The remaining horned beasts circled Liam warily, their tusks gleaming under the faint light.

They were smarter, more cautious, but they too were driven by instinct. Liam's eyes gleamed with dark amusement.

"You're all the same," he muttered under his breath, his grip tightening on his daggers. "Wild beasts with no thought beyond survival."

With a sudden burst of speed, Liam launched himself toward the nearest creature. It tried to impale him with its tusks, but he sidestepped, delivering a flurry of precise slashes to its side.

His daggers moved like extensions of his own body, fluid and relentless, each strike hitting a vital point. The beast collapsed in a heap, and as the final one charged at him in a desperate attempt, Liam vaulted over its back, landing behind it.

Before it could turn, he drove his blade into the back of its neck, ending the battle in seconds.

Panting lightly, Liam straightened, his daggers still dripping with the blood of his foes. He wiped them clean, a sense of satisfaction settling over him.

Without looking back at the carnage he'd left behind, he whispered to himself, "Extraction."

The shadows of the fallen beasts were pulled from their bodies, merging into Liam's own shadow, swelling his power further.

"This place," Liam murmured, smirking darkly, "is perfect for growing my army."