

ShadowBound 44

Chapter 44: The Dragon's Wrath

The three of them—Liam, Asher, and Dylan—launched themselves at the dragon in perfect, chaotic unison.

Asher led the charge with his blue flames roaring around him, his eyes gleaming with competitive fire.

Liam followed close behind, calm and focused, his sharp gaze scanning the dragon's massive frame for any weak spot.

Dylan brought up the rear, grinning ear to ear, enjoying the adrenaline of the battle as if it were the best day of his life.

"Try to keep up, losers!" Asher shouted, flames flaring from his hands and feet as he rocketed toward the dragon.

"Relax, Blue Flames, no one's trying to steal your spotlight," Dylan teased, nocking an arrow mid-sprint and firing it toward the beast's head.

The arrow gleamed with metallic light, aiming for the dragon's eye, but the beast tilted its head just in time, the arrow bouncing harmlessly off its thick, obsidian scales.

Liam said nothing. He kept moving in tight, calculated arcs, his daggers drawn, eyes narrowing as the dragon's immense size loomed above them.

The dragon retaliated swiftly, its jaws parting to unleash a torrent of purple fire that cascaded toward them like a tidal wave of heat. "Scatter!" Liam barked, his voice cold and precise.

The three boys split in different directions as the firestorm raged between them. The ground beneath their feet melted into scorched earth, and the air shimmered with intense heat. Dylan dove behind a fallen tree, rolling smoothly and already preparing another shot.

Asher skidded along the ground, flames bursting beneath his heels to give him momentum as he surged forward. Liam darted low and fast, the edge of the fire licking at his heels but never quite touching him.

The dragon swung its tail like a wrecking ball, catching Asher mid-dash. "Tch—!" Asher tried to dodge, but the tail clipped him hard, sending him flying into a boulder.

The impact shattered the rock, and Asher groaned, flames flickering around his body as he forced himself back to his feet.

"Still standing, huh? You're tougher than you look, Blue Flames!" Dylan called, releasing another volley of arrows aimed at the dragon's joints. This time, one arrow managed to wedge between two scales on its leg, but the dragon barely noticed.

"Focus, idiot!" Asher growled, coughing as he wiped blood from the corner of his mouth. His flames reignited with a defiant roar, and he charged back into the fight, determined to outshine both Dylan and Liam.

The dragon roared again, this time sweeping its claws in a deadly arc. Liam ducked low, barely avoiding the slash, his daggers flashing in quick, precise strikes along the beast's side.

The blades sparked uselessly against its armor-like scales. "Tough hide," Liam muttered, eyes still scanning for a vulnerable point.

Meanwhile, Asher surged in from the opposite side, blue flames trailing in his wake. He aimed a fiery uppercut at the dragon's jaw, but the beast jerked back with surprising agility.

The flames exploded harmlessly in the air, leaving Asher seething with frustration. "Damn it! Stay still, you overgrown lizard!"

The dragon wasn't about to comply. It unleashed another wave of purple fire, forcing them all to retreat. This time, the flames were relentless, spreading across the battlefield.

Dylan found himself cornered, the fire cutting off his escape. "Uh-oh. Not good!" he muttered, leaping up a tree in a desperate move. He perched on a high branch, panting. "Okay, new rule—don't let the dragon play fire tag."

Liam darted around the dragon's side, his daggers gleaming. With calm precision, he tried once more to find a weak point—pressing against joints, beneath scales—but each time, the dragon shifted, forcing him back.

The beast's movements were too fluid, too practiced.

'This thing fights like it's done this a thousand times', Liam thought, narrowly avoiding a swipe from its claws.

The dragon's tail lashed out again, and this time, it caught Dylan mid-air. "Oh, crap!" he yelped as the tail slammed him into the dirt with a bone-rattling thud. He rolled onto his back, groaning. "That... was not part of the plan..."

Asher roared, igniting his entire arm in blazing blue fire. "Enough games!" He leapt toward the dragon's exposed side, fire surging in his fist.

He slammed into the beast with all his strength, triggering a small explosion of blue myst. The blast staggered the dragon for a moment, but it recovered too quickly, its head snapping toward him.

The dragon's claw swiped, catching Asher across the ribs. The force sent him tumbling across the ground, coughing and struggling to breathe.

Blood seeped from the gashes along his side, but he still managed to get to his feet, flames flickering weakly around him. "I'm not done yet..." he growled, though the pain was evident in his voice.

Liam wasn't faring much better. The dragon's relentless attacks left little room for him to maneuver. A sudden lash of the beast's tail hit him squarely in the side, sending him crashing into the dirt.

His ribs throbbed, and he could taste blood in his mouth. But he pushed himself up, dragging his daggers through the ground as he stood. His gaze remained cold and focused.

Dylan, now sporting a bruised arm and a nasty cut across his brow, staggered to his feet with a grin. "Alright, so maybe this isn't exactly going as planned... but hey, it's still kinda fun, right?"

Asher shot him a glare. "You're insane."

"Maybe." Dylan nocked another arrow, blood trickling down his temple. "But you gotta admit, it's a little exciting!"

The dragon let out another deafening roar, its purple fire swirling around it like a storm. It was clear now—they weren't just fighting a dragon. They were fighting something far more dangerous: a creature that refused to die.

Asher and Dylan exchanged glances while Liam still had his eyes fixed on the dragon. Each of them were battered, bruised, and exhausted. Asher's flames flickered weakly, Dylan's bow trembled slightly in his hands, and Liam's daggers felt heavier than ever.

But despite everything, none of them backed down.

Liam exhaled slowly, his eyes still sharp. "Hope you guys are still breathing."

Asher cracked his knuckles, flames reigniting with a stubborn flicker. "This thing is so dead."

Dylan grinned through the blood and bruises. "Let's give this thing something to remember."

The boys launched themselves once again, their movements synchronized like a storm of fire and steel.

Liam led with his daggers flashing, Asher burned trails across the battlefield with his blue flames, and Dylan's arrows whistled through the air, trying to find purchase on the dragon's armored hide.

The dragon roared, filling the air with heat and fury, but the boys didn't falter.

As the battle raged, Liam noticed something—during a moment when the dragon reared to strike, he slashed beneath its belly and felt something different.

His dagger didn't glance off the scales as it usually did. Instead, it cut ever so slightly into the flesh below, as if the armor didn't extend that far.

His eyes narrowed. 'Found it'

As the fight continued, Liam stayed close to the beast, waiting for any chance to confirm his suspicion. Finally, a gap opened—a glimpse beneath the dragon's body where a faint, pulsating light shimmered just beneath the surface. The core.

Liam pulled back, quickly formulating a plan. "We need to draw it into a position where I can strike under it. Asher, you've got to distract it with your flames—keep it moving. Dylan, you hit its wings and keep it grounded."

Dylan gave a thumbs-up, already readying an arrow. "I'm game."

But Asher sneered, flames flickering around him. "Tch. You don't give me orders, you dwarf. I don't need your plan to take down a dragon."

"You can do as you please, buzz cut." Liam said completely unbothered. "but just know we can't win if—"

"You do your part, I'll do mine," Asher snapped, flames flaring brighter. Without waiting for confirmation, he surged toward the dragon, blue fire trailing behind him in a streak. "I'll just burn it down myself!"

The dragon reacted to Asher's reckless charge with a deafening roar, wings unfurling as it turned its full attention on him.

Dylan swore under his breath and fired a volley of arrows at the dragon's injured wing, trying to keep it grounded. The arrows hit their mark, pinning the torn membrane to the ground and limiting the dragon's movement.

"Alright, Blue Flames," Dylan muttered with a grin. "You're a pain, but at least you make one hell of a distraction."

Liam clenched his jaw. 'Well then, I'll just have to make this work however I can.' He sprinted in, daggers drawn, keeping low and to the side, waiting for the moment the dragon would rise onto its hind legs again.

Asher danced around the dragon with blinding speed, hurling fireballs and blasts of flame at its head. The dragon snarled in frustration, snapping at him with sharp jaws but never quite catching him. "Come on, you ugly beast!" Asher taunted, flames bursting from his fists.

'There!'

The dragon reared up, exposing the soft flesh beneath its belly. Liam surged forward, his daggers gleaming as he aimed for the shimmering core beneath the dragon's scales. Everything seemed to slow—this was the opening they needed.

Just as Liam was about to strike, the dragon roared with unexpected ferocity. In one explosive, frantic motion, it lashed out with its tail, sweeping the battlefield with a shockwave.

Dylan tried to leap clear, but the tail caught him midair, slamming him into a tree with a sickening crack.

Asher's eyes widened as the dragon's massive claw swung toward him. He summoned all the fire he could, throwing it forward in a desperate explosion, but the beast's strength was overwhelming.

The impact threw him backward, flames flickering out as he crashed into a boulder with a heavy thud.

Liam barely had time to react before the dragon's tail whipped toward him, smashing him off his feet and hurling him through the air. He slammed into the ground, skidding to a stop against a jagged rock. His daggers fell from his grasp, and pain flared through his ribs like wildfire.

For a moment, the battlefield fell silent except for the dragon's heavy breathing and the crackling of scorched earth.

All three boys lay sprawled across the ground—Dylan slumped against a tree, Asher half-buried in the rubble of shattered stone, and Liam face down in the dirt. Their bodies were bruised and battered, blood trickling from cuts and wounds.

Dylan groaned softly, his arm limp at an awkward angle. "Ow... okay, so that didn't go as planned..."

Asher's flames sputtered weakly around him, his body refusing to respond. He clenched his fists, frustrated beyond belief, but the pain in his ribs and back kept him pinned down. "Damn it..." he whispered, teeth gritted. "I should've—"

Liam lay still, gasping for breath, his chest burning with every inhalation. His mind screamed at him to move, to get up, to finish the job—but his muscles refused to cooperate. He could feel the dragon looming nearby, hear the low rumble of its breath as it prowled closer.

Though all three of them were still breathing, it was clear—they were utterly spent. The dragon had taken everything they had and still stood tall, its purple fire flickering ominously in the dark.

The dragon's footsteps rumbled like distant thunder as it stalked toward Liam, each step causing the ground to tremble.

Its eyes glowed with the cold promise of death, and a faint shimmer of purple mist gathered at the edges of its jaws.

Liam lay broken and battered, his body betraying him at the worst possible moment, muscles twitching but refusing to obey.

'Move, dammit. Get up! Get up, you bastard!'

His mind screamed with fury, his thoughts blazing like a wildfire. But his limbs were as heavy as stone, and the ache in his ribs robbed him of breath.

The dragon stopped just above him, casting a dark shadow over his body. Its jaws began to part, and a sinister glow gathered in the depths of its throat—a warning of the deadly fire about to be unleashed.

Liam's body remained limp, but his mind raged, clawing for a way out. No. Not like this. Not after everything. Desperately, he turned his head just enough to glimpse the beast looming over him.

"There's no way I'm dying here..." he muttered, voice hoarse and weak. "I'm gonna make you... my slave." The words were barely a whisper, but they burned with every ounce of defiance he had left.

The dragon reared its head, purple fire coiling within its maw like a serpent preparing to strike.

And then—

A torrent of red flames erupted from the side, smashing into the dragon with the force of a meteor. The impact sent the creature skidding backward, gouging trenches into the earth as it struggled to regain its footing. Purple mist dispersed in an instant, replaced by a sizzling heatwave.

Liam coughed violently, his vision blurring as he tried to make sense of what just happened. He could feel the intense heat lingering in the air, though it wasn't the dragon's.

A figure emerged from the haze, walking with a casual stride, as if he had all the time in the world. Flames still danced lazily around his hands, crackling with energy that dared not fade.

"Looks like you boys know how to hold on to dear life, huh?" the man said, his tone dripping with sarcasm but yet still cold as ever.

Liam blinked, straining to see through his blurry vision. "Galen...?"

Galen smirked as he stopped beside Liam, his presence commanding attention like a general surveying the battlefield. "You guys can thank the gods, since Mystica and the mages finally did their job for once."

His gaze shifted to the dragon, still standing but visibly shaken, smoke rising from its scorched scales. "Good thing that you are still kicking."

He rolled his shoulders and cracked his knuckles, fire swirling with each movement like it was an extension of his will.

"You wannabes did well to last this long, I'll give you that. But now, I'll take it from here."

Galen's eyes gleamed with confidence as he stepped forward, casually tossing a flame from hand to hand.

The dragon snarled, shaking off the red flames clinging to its body, but there was a flicker of uncertainty in its gaze now—a recognition that a new force had entered the field.

Galen, without looking back, added, "I'll show you guys how to actually kill off a dragon."