

Shadow 341

Chapter 341: For The Ladies And Dames

Damon crept up the flight of stairs, Sylvia and Evangeline silently following behind him. The upper floor was mostly a wide seating area—its design reminded him of the academy. Just like back there, it was divided into separate lounges and compartments.

The more enclosed the space the more lavish the design. Opulence at every turn even then even amid the former grandeur.

Disparities existed. This created an ugly feeling within Damon's heart as well as a twisted sense of resignation.

'It seems inequities existed even in ancient times...' he thought bitterly. 'No matter how often people talk about creating equality, it's an impossible concept. Even the heavens decree none shall be equal.'

Mountains weren't equal. Some trees grew taller, some greener. He wished inequality was a man-made creation, but it wasn't.

Even the sheep in his village made no effort to feed the weaker lambs... it was everywhere.

And he was no different. His mana was weaker—flawed—while his sister had too much. Yet fate still dealt her a cruel hand; she was too sick to use it.

He'd tried giving up once.

But giving up was a lot harder than it sounded. So he kept going, trudging forward through the fire, even if it was hell.

He shook himself from the bleak spiral. He was used to persevering. After all, he was a failure who'd even failed at giving up.

"You're quite an oddity sometimes..." Evangeline whispered.

Damon turned, shooting her a glare. "Shush... or you'll give away our location."

She bit her lip and nodded. He was right—how could they ambush their enemy if they were making noise like stumbling novices?

Sylvia tapped Evangeline's shoulder, and the two followed behind Damon as he stepped carefully over debris.

He made sure not to touch anything—not the decaying tables, nor the hosts that were now nothing but corpses.

Ever since arriving in Lysithara, he had tried feeding his shadow with these ancient bodies. But they were too old, too far gone—spoiled meat.

Some were men. Most were women.

"The ladies and dames loved this place," Valarie's voice whispered from the pair of lips on his shoulder, shattering the silence.

"Zaci's Sweet Shop used to be a place of romance... women came for the sweets, and men came for the women... and Zaci, he loved the business it brought."

Damon exhaled sharply. Did none of these women know how to shut up? They were sneaking into enemy territory, not gossiping in a tavern.

"Shut up. You're making noise," he hissed.

Sylvia had expected that. That was why she kept her mouth shut in the first place.

"..."

Valarie was speechless... and also a little appalled.

"You really have no respect for your teachers, do you? Fine. I suppose I shouldn't tell you about the presence I sensed at the third floor entrance, or the fact Thren's enthralled some of the other Mist Knights... or that they're setting an ambush."

Damon's eye twitched. He wanted nothing more than to stomp this smug pair of lips into the ground. But he needed her.

He forced a calm smile. "Oh really, teacher Vala—no, master Valarie... please, enlighten us."

The lips curled into a cold smile.

"I can feel your desire to stomp on me... you really are shameless."

She let out a sigh. "But fine... I'll do it for the girls."

Evangeline and Sylvia watched the strange exchange between Damon and the talking mouth on his shoulder in silence.

"I wish I could unsee all the things I've seen," Evangeline muttered.

"Throw my coin in the wishing well too," Sylvia replied.

Damon's plan had been risky from the start. But it seemed the enemy had caught wind of it.

After all, this was its turf. They knew how the city had changed better than Valarie, who'd been sealed away for thousands of years.

"He has a magic artifact," Valarie said quietly.

"It can enthrall the minds of anyone he defeats. He didn't use it much when he was still uncorrupted—it strained the human mind. But now... he doesn't care.... Or have much of a mind.. to strain."

Damon glanced at Sylvia. She was already activating her skill.

"Can we take them... just the three of us?" he asked.

Sylvia paused. Before she could answer, Valarie spoke again.

"You can. He can only use that on people one rank below him. Plus, they lose much of their strength. They're just living puppets."

Sylvia's eyes widened slightly as she took a slow breath.

"He spent years hunting down every Mist Knight weaker than himself," she said quietly.

"it says he didn't want to be surrounded by corpses. In his madness, he tried to recreate something familiar. Now he surrounds himself with a false order—empty husks with no will. Nothing like the true knights of Lysithara... once feared across the realm."

Damon nodded slowly and looked at Valarie.

"How sad... I suppose I wasn't the only one who suffered over the years. My people suffered too. Thren was always a loner, even in our golden days. But he was kind... tricky, but kind."

She paused for a moment, her voice softer than before.

"I beg you—behind those doors are once great warriors. Now, they suffer. Please... put them out of their misery."

Damon exhaled and drew his sword from a makeshift sheath.

Good. A chance to kill Mist Knights and level up. A godsend... assuming he didn't die.

"Your debt to us just keeps growing. You better help us find a way back home after this."

Valarie chuckled faintly. "I can't wait to be rid of you. I'll gladly send you back just to get you out of my life."

"You're dead though." Damon retorted glancing at the pair of delicate lips.

"Out of my afterlife." she corrected herself.

Sylvia turned to Damon.

"We have a good chance... but what's the plan?"

Damon grinned.

"We don't want the other three getting overwhelmed and killed before we finish him, so..."

He kicked the door down with a thunderous crash.

"Let's kill them quickly."

Chapter 342: Knights Of Thren

Damon was starting to feel like he'd been kicking down a lot of doors lately... and getting into a lot more dire battles. Something about this whole thing just felt off to him. He didn't know why—maybe it was just paranoia... or maybe it was a sixth sense warning him something wasn't right.

The whole horde of undead had gathered far too quickly. It was far too organized...

There was Mist Knight Thren, who was supposedly the mastermind—but Damon had a bad feeling gnawing at the back of his mind.

It was for that very reason he decided—he was just gonna kill the wretched corrupted knight.

He could feel the ground begin to rumble as soon as he kicked the door. It seemed Thren had called back his undead army.

Which meant one thing... the Mist Knight wasn't certain his current entourage could protect him from Damon and the two girls.

Damon admired the knight's cunning—but he couldn't help being a little disappointed by his overall reliance on bones to do the fighting.

He raised his head and peered into the room beyond the broken door, his whole aura radiating menace. He activated Omen of Dread, letting the skill sink into the air, making his presence heavier... sending shudders of fear into the hearts of all those with weaker mantles.

The room itself was massive—lavish once, but long since decayed. Multiple doors, wide and towering, stood on each side. A grand balcony stretched overhead, with a sweeping flight of stairs that curled like the ribs of a dead beast.

A massive chandelier hung dead-center, its crystals dulled and tangled in cobwebs.

Smaller chandeliers dotted the ceiling. Tables lay overturned. A pool, once pristine, was now murky and thick with rot.

The place reeked of ruin—mold crawling on the walls, decay seeping into the floors. A few corpses still sat at the tables—well-dressed, with decaying jewels glinting faintly on their fingers and throats.

If Damon regretted anything in Lysithara, it was not having a way to carry all the stuff he could've sold for money... the riches of the dead were one of many.

His second regret? Having to be here at all.

He now stood face-to-face with a small group of armored knights—their bodies shifting like mist. Three stood directly in front of him.

Covered in armor that shimmered and blurred like fog, their visors lacked the same glow Alazard once had—almost as if they'd been stripped of the formidable wills that let them endure for thousands of years, even in corruption.

They held swords and shields like a trained unit. Their armor had no glaring weaknesses—only the creeping decay of a ruinous presence that slithered from within.

On the balcony above, two more knights stood—one clearly a mage class, draped in a light robe with armor underneath... the other, an archer, his bow visibly enchanted, pulsing faintly.

Damon smiled faintly. He was about due for an upgrade to his bow and arrows anyway.

He'd lost most of his arrows fighting the war trolls, and had wisely dumped the cursed ore arrows before entering the whispering forest—at least, what was left of them.

No words were exchanged.

No words needed to be.

As soon as the door fell, only a moment passed. Their hesitation had come from Damon's Omen of Dread.

Sylvia and Evangeline didn't waste time.

"We'll take out the mage and the archer. You get rid of the rest."

Damon didn't even get the chance to reply.

Valarie's voice curled with amusement on his lips.

"They either have faith in your power—or they just didn't want to deal with the work..."

He raised his sword with a thin smile as his Remorseless skill activated.

"Let's hope it's the former..."

He dove straight at the enemy—his body folding into a shadowy blur as he glided toward the floor. The moment he got close to the Mist Knights, he reformed—human again—and slashed at the back of one before it could melt into mist.

Assuming they still had the intelligence to do so.

"Striking your opponent from the back... you truly have no honor..."

Damon sneered, parrying a sword strike that came at his face.

"They're the ones attacking three on one, and I'm the dishonorable one?"

He shifted into mist—his armor activating with a low hum. The knight he struck fell to his knees, the disintegration sword eating away at what little remained of its corrupted soul.

[You have slain Mist Knight Nide]

Damon rolled out of the way of a shield, turning into shadow. The remaining knights eyed his sword and armor—he could feel something like emotion from these enthralled warriors.

Even though their fierce wills were suppressed, their discipline was intact. They raised their shields and swords, shifting into a variation of Alazard's swordsmanship—this time incorporating shields instead of single blades.

The ground quaked with the clash of battle.

Bright flashes lit the distance—Evangeline and Sylvia were fighting, shaking the building with their power.

Damon narrowed his gaze at the two knights still before him.

He'd lost the element of surprise, but he needed to kill them quickly. He spread his shadow perception outward—Leona, Matia, and Xander were still locked in combat with a tide of relentless undead.

Valarie's voice hummed from his shoulder.

"You seem to use a very formalistic mix of Lysithara swordsmanship... and some rigid basics. You know slightly advanced forms, but not what makes our sword style strong. This is a good time to learn the fundamentals."

Damon's eyes narrowed. "Thanks for the offer... but my friends need me to finish this quickly. I'm not risking their lives for my own selfish interests."

Valarie chuckled. "Congratulations. You pass the test. I'll teach you—myself. First... kill them."

Damon spun forward, blade ready.

"Say no more..."

His sword met a shield—and he was the one pushed back. Another knight lunged from the side, smashing his shield into Damon's gut.

He coughed slightly, a dull ache blooming in his ribs as his body crashed into the wall, slamming it apart as debris buried him.

Valarie's voice echoed from within the rubble.

"Wow. You sure showed them..."

Chapter 343: Overwhelming Violence

Damon didn't grace her sarcasm with a response. He hadn't even seen that move coming—their coordination was masterful.

So this was how the knights of Lysithara fought? If they were already this dreadful with their wills suppressed... just how powerful would they be if not?

He turned into a shadow, evading a stomp aimed directly at him. The floor cracked and shattered from the knight's attack.

Damon swung his sword, but the knight turned into mist, evading the counter in a blur of vapor.

The clash of steel rang out as his blade scraped across a raised shield.

"What the hell kind of technique is that...? They're covering each other's weaknesses," he muttered through gritted teeth, irritation swelling in his chest.

"I can't beat them with pure skill..."

Valarie's lips pressed together. "Yes. They are well-trained, after all. The only way is to overwhelm them with power."

Damon scoffed, a thin smile playing at his lips.

"I can do that..."

He activated the [5x] skill—one he had been saving for his battle with Thren. But he didn't care anymore.

He wasn't going to hold back any longer. He would obliterate everything.

Though he had to be cautious—some of his skills consumed Shadow Energy. And the stronger the skill, the more mana and shadow it burned.

Mana wasn't the issue. Not anymore—his reserves were colossal.

Shadow energy, however... that was the real problem.

But right now, he didn't give a damn.

He just wanted to end this quickly—the sooner, the better.

"You guys are annoying... I suppose I'll just cook you in your armor."

Damon unleashed the Ashborn skill despite the pain it inflicted. A wave of black flame erupted—dark as void, yet hot enough to incinerate the soul, and cold enough to freeze it.

A heatless, deathly fire that seared everything in its wake.

The first knight slammed his shield to the ground, a thunderous shockwave dispersing the black flames like wind tearing through smoke.

Damon paused, kneeling amid the burning agony, watching with a dumbfounded expression.

Did they just disperse... the flames that could reduce both flesh and soul to ash... with technique?

"Huh... right. The shields have enchantments like that."

He rolled to the side, dodging instinctively.

"If you tell me you're the one who invented this, I'll really stomp on you..."

The lips that had once been a woman smiled on his shoulder.

"I didn't. In fact, this was all Valcara's and Mugu's work... but it has a flaw..."

Damon's sword clashed against the knight's shield. He turned to mist, then shadow, evading a chain of brutal sword strikes.

"What flaw?"

Valarie paused, clearly letting the tension build.

"Isn't it obvious? It has a cooldown time. Do I have to tell you everything, boy?"

Damon's eyes turned colder. "So you're telling me it's a one-time thing?"

Valarie smiled at his realization.

"That's right. But the other knight hasn't used his..."

Damon lowered his sword, shadows flickering in his eyes. His stomach growled from a familiar hunger he was already getting used to.

"Fine... then I'll just eviscerate everything."

His mana surged. Shadows roared to life.

Valarie's voice cut in, calm and reasoning. "Try not to burn your allies. And remember... these are just the vanguard."

Damon didn't respond. He simply whispered, "I know... I was aiming for the ones in the other room too."

Yes. He had Shadow Perception. He could sense the others—more knights—lurking within.

He had to give it to Thren... this mist knight was insidious with his schemes.

But honestly, Damon didn't care anymore.

There was one simple truth in this world.

In the face of overwhelming violence, cunning meant nothing.

And Damon was mentally preparing himself to unleash the most overwhelming amount of violence he was capable of.

He braced for the pain. Activating the Sacrifice skill, he poured a large portion of his mana stats into his Shadow Energy pool.

The hunger vanished as his shadow was fed—but it was temporary. He knew that.

It was just a precaution to ensure he didn't deplete his shadow and go ravenous mid-battle.

He turned into mist, dodging the knights. Then, with Shadow Movement, dove into the floor, gliding across the battlefield and reappearing by the door.

The knights, dull-eyed and will-less, instinctively thought they had him cornered.

They slowly approached, shields raised like hunters closing in.

"They're trying to box you in..."

Damon whispered back coldly,

"I know..."

The two knights charged at him. Damon ducked low and slipped into a shadow, gliding beneath their heavy boots—past the wreckage—before emerging behind them, facing the door.

He took his human form once more. His eyes were icy.

The knights turned. Their visors dull, without any light.

Damon raised both hands. Shadows flickered madly around him. Pain, deep and agonizing, crawled through every fiber of his being.

He forced out a single cold word in place of a scream.

"Die."

An immolating pillar of destruction erupted from his body. The air twisted under the sheer pressure of it.

The knight raised his shield to disperse it—

But this time... it wasn't enough.

Only a faint ripple broke the surge. A flutter of resistance in the black inferno.

Then—

Hell was unleashed.

Half the battlefield vanished under the wrath of the Ashborn flames.

The door turned to ash.

And the knights hidden beyond it—consumed.

Nothing remained. Nothing but ash.

Damon collapsed to his knees. His mind reeled from the pain. His head buzzed from depleted mana and drained shadow energy.

[You have slain Mist Knight Notre.]

[You have slain Mist Knight Teow.]

[You have slain Mist Knight Kerry.]

[You have slain...]

He hit the ground hard—but none of the names were Thren.

So the battle... wasn't over.

Silence reigned.

Evangeline and Sylvia had slain their foes.

But the true threat remained.

The two girls hurried to his side, without a scratch on their bodies or armor.

He clicked his tongue they really left the heavy lifting to him.

Sylvia helped him up looking into the darkness of an adjacent door.

Damon sensed him, he knew.

It was time to confront the corrupted knight.

And as if to signal the next act—

Footsteps echoed slowly in the distance.

Chapter 344: Thren

Damon was mentally strained from the battle. His mana was low, and his shadow energy was even lower. Perhaps this could be considered part of Mist Knight Thren's strategy—to fight Damon and his party only when he was sure they were at their weakest, already exhausted from battling his enthralled mist knights.

No matter, Damon was actually stronger when his shadow energy was depleted.

In fact one could say, that was when he was the most monstrous. In the end there was still no denying he was still exhausted.

However, Damon was the only one truly depleted. The two girls were still brimming with energy. Mana pulsed through their bodies.

There was no sign of weakness, why else would Damon cut lose. He was sure they could cover for him.

'Does he not consider them a threat...?'

That would be a grave mistake. Just like Damon, these two girls were monsters in their own right. Yet the enemy before them was no ordinary opponent. He was a rank two mist knight.

Damon squinted at the figure, half-shrouded by faint mist. Glowing eyes shone from under his hood—he wore no helm like the others.

Still, his body was clad in full plate armor, lighter than standard but unmistakably enchanted. A spear gleamed in his grip, the head embedded with a glowing gem.

His gauntlets didn't seem to match the armor.

"Thren's magic artifact... the Selfless Gauntlets..." Valarie's voice floated from Damon's shoulder, touched by caution.

"He's rank two. I suppose time hasn't been kind. Even after a thousand years... he's still here. Suffering..." she muttered, narrowing her eyes.

He stood silent, as if appraising them.

"He's buying time—for his undead to overwhelm the others outside..." Sylvia added coldly.

Valarie spoke up again. Though now only a pair of lips, she hoped the corrupted knight would remember her voice.

He had changed, twisted by corruption, and she wasn't even sure it was still him. But the gear... the gauntlets... they matched. It had to be him.

"Thren of the Fifth Order... do you remember my voice?"

No response. The glowing eyes under the hood didn't flicker, unmoved by her words.

Her lips curled slightly with grief. "He doesn't seem to remember me... then again, he never knew me on a personal level."

Damon sighed. Naturally, he hadn't expected it to work. Valarie was a powerful Ascendant a champion of the ancient city.

It would be weird if some rank two knight knew here on a personal level.

As for how she knew him....Damon did not care enough to ask.

He pointed at the knight—a ruined image of his former self.

"Isn't it a bit dishonorable? Enslaving your fellow knights to fight your battles..."

Coming from Damon, who wasn't exactly honorable himself, the girls weren't sure how to react. Was this the pot calling the kettle black... or something worse?

Valarie cut in. "Don't you pride yourself on having no pride? I seem to recall you were impressed by his methods..."

Damon didn't take his eyes off Thren. "I like it better when I'm the one doing the scheming."

Sylvia sighed, edging slowly toward Damon's sword lying on the ground.

"Right... I remember. He's also a sore loser."

Evangeline understood immediately what was happening. Damon was unarmed, and they needed to get his sword back before the knight decided to act. Still, Damon was unnerved. Why wasn't Thren attacking?

Was it confidence or something else. He found that doubtful.

Sylvia stopped beside the sword.

The mist knight's face suddenly snapped in her direction.

A wave of mist surged toward her—silent, formless, carrying a deathly intent.

But it wasn't fast enough. She kicked the sword toward Damon, dodging the long-range strike with practiced ease.

"Sylvia supports us, Evangeline—"

He didn't finish the sentence.

She was already moving.

She charged at the knight, the source of the massive undead army harassing the rest of their party.

Evangeline moved like a blur, trailing phantom images in her wake. Her rapier clashed with Thren's spear. The knight didn't even budge.

The ground trembled beneath their suffocating impact. Cracks spread through the floor like veins. What little glass remained shattered with a thunderous bang.

Damon couldn't help but think of the day he'd first seen Renata and Lilith clash...

The mist knight may have been rank two, but Evangeline—though only first class—was a monster herself. She had absorbed the bulk of the mana cores their party had collected. Her physical stats made her a walking catastrophe.

No wonder the building was falling apart.

Still, the gap in rank wasn't easy to overcome. She was pushed back slightly, even though Thren didn't appear to be the brute strength type. His physique, though... it was still solid.

It didn't matter.

White glowing arrows soared toward the knight. He raised his hand, conjuring a spell barrier to block the attack.

Sylvia had expected that.

She didn't aim to kill—she aimed to create an opening.

From the ground, a shadow rose—solidifying into Damon, sword in hand, appearing right next to Thren.

It should have been over.

The blade pierced through the knight's body... yet Damon felt nothing. No resistance. No impact. No armor. No blood.

It was like cutting through air.

He looked up.

The knight's glowing eyes stared back beneath the hood, mocking him.

That's when he noticed.

This knight had no shadow.

It was as if he wasn't even there.

Damon's breath caught.

"This... this is an illusion," Valarie's voice muttered darkly.

"He shifted positions and left an illusion behind at the last second. Yes... I remember now. It's his first class skill. Tricky... but it gets worse..."

Evangeline narrowed her eyes. "How worse?"

Sylvia stiffened. Her expression tightened, dread crawling across her face.

"This worse..."

Damon lifted his gaze.

In front of them—dozens of identical Threns. Mist-cloaked, indistinguishable from the original.

Valarie's lips pressed into a line.

"They're all illusions. Only one is real."

She didn't need to say the rest.

Let your guard down...

...and you die.

Chapter 345: Intent To Will

Valarie didn't need to spell out the obvious. Mist Knight Thren was formidable. He had proven that by retaining his cunning despite thousands of years of corruption gnawing away at what remained of his will.

His form was pulsing with mist. His eyes cold under the hood no emotions were revealed.

Damon could no longer deny his cunning.

He had cornered the whole party with an army of undead—after splitting them up, of course... then again they didn't do much together anyway.

A classic divide-and-conquer. And when they finally planned to strike back, he welcomed them with a group of enthralled, heavily armed mist knights. All lower rank than him, but no less deadly.

They never had the element of surprise. All they had been doing was adapting to changing circumstances.

Now, Mist Knight Thren stood before them—or rather, a whole group of him stood before them. Each one appeared as real as the last. But all save one were illusions.

The real one could shift between the false bodies. Sneaky. The kind of trick Damon himself would pull.

That said, Thren miscalculated something. True, he had the rank advantage, and yes, he was more experienced. He had endured thousands of years corrupted—his willpower unquestionable.

But... he had never met anyone like Damon.

Damon was tired. His mana was low, and his shadow energy even lower.

But that only made him stronger.

Well, it shouldn't have mattered. Thren still had his illusion trick up his sleeve. Except if Damon wanted to turn ravenous and gain the overwhelming power his shadow possessed in price of his humanity.

He shook his head.

It didn't matter.

Damon had shadow perception.

A spatial awareness that allowed him to sense shadows—and all living things cast shadows, with some eldritch or unlucky exceptions.

Mist Knight Thren was in for a rude awakening.

Damon took the long game. Again.

Evangeline raised her sword, the rapier gleaming with golden light.

"Damon... which one is he?"

Damon wasn't sure if she asked because she thought he knew, or just because he was the party leader and someone had to say something.

He couldn't let Thren catch on. He had to play them too.

"I don't. I'm not an oracle."

Saying that, both he and Evangeline glanced at Sylvia—the silver-haired elven girl. Oracle and seer—if there was even a difference, she blurred the line.

Sylvia sighed, shaking her head slowly. "I could ask for the answer... but I wouldn't like the price. So why bother? My intuition tells me we'll be fine."

Damon glanced at the pair of lips resting on his shoulder—the only visible remnant of the former ascendant, Valarie Sunwarden.

"Her intuition is going to get us killed..."

Valarie smiled, even though all that was left of her were lips.

"This is a valuable learning experience. You can train your instinct with this."

Damon narrowed his eyes. Aside from shadow perception... did this ancient pair of lips actually know another method to discern the original from the fakes?

Sylvia held her bow with a calm, focused expression. "I see. She means we should use our sixth sense—our intuition—to tell which is real. From his gaze..."

Damon instantly understood.

Sometimes, when you gazed at an enemy with hostile intent—or even glanced at them directly—some could feel it. Sense that they were being watched.

Valarie wanted them to replicate that. To train their senses. To feel Thren's intent from the illusions.

Damon saw a flaw immediately. Thren could simply start observing them with peripheral vision—masking his killing intent.

Thren grew impatient. He must've gotten tired of waiting for them to act.

So he did.

All of him—the illusions and the true body, shrouded in thick mist—rushed forward.

But Damon sensed it. The unmoving shadow of the original, buried among the fakes.

Evangeline raised her arm, expecting the crushing weight of a spear, the floor to crack beneath her, the wind to howl with the force of the blow—

But nothing happened.

There was no wind.

Her sword had passed through empty air.

The Thren she thought she'd engage—just an illusion.

Sylvia clicked her tongue in irritation. The sounds of battle outside were growing louder. The others wouldn't hold for long. The undead might be weak individually, but they never tire.

She raised her bow and fired a volley of white arrows at the mist knights. Each illusion dodged them fluidly—mimicking life to conceal the original.

Valarie sneered. "The trick is impressive. But a shame. Anyone of higher rank could still kill him easily... even with this."

Damon felt the urge to throw her off. He was dodging spells—spells he knew were illusions. But he couldn't afford a mistake.

He wanted to make his own illusion.

Not with magic.

But with cunning.

Damon's goal was simple: approach the real Thren and strike him down.

"He can't hide his intent to kill. No one can. When you have a desire to kill, it reflects in your intention..."

Valarie offered counsel from his shoulder. "You have to remember—intention forms the basis of every action. It is the first step in creating will."

Damon weaved between attacks. He appeared exhausted. As the illusions cast wind blades, sharp currents sliced through the air.

He dodged. A small piece of his hair was cut as a real attack slipped into the chaos.

But it didn't matter. Sylvia saw it too. She fired a white arrow—no, a pillar of moonlight—toward the true Thren.

The glowing light rippled through the ancient floor that had once been Zaci's sweet Vip floor.

Damon watched as Thren was engulfed by the white light.

He narrowed his eyes weakly. "Did they just kill him because he got careless...?"

His eyes widened. He rolled to the side.

A spear tip passed by his face—too close.

He had sensed the shadow behind him at the last moment.

Thren had the ability to teleport between his real body and illusions.

Damon slipped into shadow, putting distance between them.

"We need to kill him in a single strike," he said darkly, "or this will never end."

Chapter 346: The True Hunter

Killing a rank two monster in a single strike — that was the stuff of legends, a feat whispered about among average first-class parties. And yet, here Damon was, with only half his party present, planning to do exactly that to a rank two Mist Knight.

It would've been wildly ambitious. Those who had reached higher-class advancements were already superhuman.

Damon himself was proof — even without magic, he could sprint a kilometer in moments.

He still remembered his encounter with the evil forest wendigo. Just a rank one monster, yet it had closed the kilometer-long distance between them in the blink of an eye, before Damon could even think of escape.

He gripped his sword tighter.

He wasn't the same boy he'd been weeks ago.

Funny. Just weeks. And yet it already felt like years since he'd gotten the system.

He surged forward toward the Mist Knight in front of him — Thren. Part of him expected the corrupted knight to vanish into mist, teleport away, or pull some other trick.

But he didn't.

He met Damon's blade head-on, his gaze stopping on the sword. A flicker of emotion — barely visible — trembled across his corrupted face.

As if he were remembering... a friend.

Evangeline seized the moment, unleashing a radiant blade. Damon noticed — again — how much she seemed to favor that spell.

He didn't have time to dwell on it.

He threw a punch, dark flames spiraling around his fist — but the knight didn't even flinch as the energy faltered. Damon's shadow energy reserves were too low.

That was fine.

A streak of cold, blue-white arrows hissed through the air, embedding into the Mist Knight's hood. Their cruelty was almost disturbing... especially coming from Sylvia.

She looked irritated. Her grey eyes shimmered like steel. It did no damage he simply moved away.

"Hmph." Valarie's disembodied lips curled, even without a face. "That one's a bit protective of you."

Damon heard her, but didn't respond. He already knew what she was implying.

He flipped mid-air using his parkour skills, transitioning into a flawless landing, his own technique pushing his body further than human limits.

It was time to end it.

He spread his shadow perception outward.

Matia was back-to-back with Leon, standing atop a mound of shattered skeletons.

Just as Damon had instructed, they hadn't hesitated to use Xander as a shield. His armor was dented, but he still fought on — dueling a four-armed undead creature alone.

Damon exhaled slowly.

If he didn't finish this now, they'd all fall. One mistake could mean the difference between life and death. He had to act now.

He pointed across the battlefield at one of the Mist Knights. "That one. He's Thren."

Evangeline sensed a surge of hostility from that direction. Almost too obvious. Too clean. She hesitated, then nodded and dashed through the illusion.

Damon nodded at Sylvia. She understood. Together, they focused on the supposed knight, ignoring every other illusion as their bodies phased through the misty fakes.

He curved around from the flank, rushing in from the side. His target flinched.

A fake.

He kept going, spears sailing through his body — illusions, all of them.

He closed in on the knight, eyes locked. Evangeline and Sylvia aimed their spells, ready to strike.

At the last moment, Damon shifted.

His sword flashed, carving clean through a knight to the left — one who hadn't reacted at all.

A solid hit.

He felt his blade pierce armor, slice flesh.

He activated Bloodletting — inducing a brutal bleeding effect. His blade laced with power that severed soul and body alike.

Disintegration, the power of molecular breakdown.

His gaze locked with cold, glowing eyes.

"I can sense your shadow," he muttered. "You got full of yourself because we kept falling for your tricks."

The corrupted knight gasped, blood pouring from the wound. He had let his guard down. Victory had been within reach — and Damon had feigned desperation perfectly.

Valarie's voice carried a rare ease. "A sound strategy... Make him think you hadn't noticed, then strike when he thinks he's won. I suppose we now know who's more insidious."

The Mist Knight collapsed to his knees, his voice low and broken.

"You have bested... Thren of the Glades..."

His soul flickered, light snuffed out. He fell.

Damon heard a familiar chime.

[You have slain Mist Knight Elks.]

He froze.

Elks?

He turned toward Valarie. His lips parted but no words came out. The Mist Knight had said they bested Thren — not that he was Thren.

Damon expanded his shadow perception again.

There.

A faint presence. Hidden in the corner of the room. Still, motionless, like a statue.

He'd missed it.

He threw his sword.

A blur of steel shot across the room, too fast to track.

Thud.

A rasping exhale followed. An armorless man in a black tunic appeared, face concealed in a deep hood. Damon's blade was lodged in his chest.

The real Thren.

The man fell.

[You have slain Mist Knight Thren.]

[You have leveled up.]

[You have gained 90 attribute points.]

[You have awakened the skill: Shadow Storage.]

It happened so fast, the others didn't even know how to react.

Valarie's lips pressed together.. " how..."

Damon sighed, his shoulders sagging. "It's almost sundown... Grab what's valuable and let's go. Hurry."

They scoured the battlefield quickly, taking what they could, and left with Valarie in tow.

They had survived. Again.

The sun dipped low in the ruined skyline of the ancient city.

And then...

A faceless entity walked in.

It scanned the ground, especially the spaces where Sylvia had fought — nothing. It approached the spot where Thren's corpse had lain, only blood now, devoured by Damon's shadow when no one was looking.

It knelt, smearing some of the spilled blood across where its lips should've been.

A voice echoed — Thren's voice.

"Useless... after you failed me..."

It paused.

"...This makes the hunt even more interesting. I can continue to study goddess races and—"

The words stopped.

Its mouth vanished.

Expressionless, the face stealer stood and continued on its path, fading into the dark — following Damon and his party from the shadows.

Chapter 347: A Place To Call Home

Lysithara was bleak and beautiful, its dying sun casting a solemn light over the ruined city. Even in its crumbling state, there was a certain grace to it—like a mausoleum where the dead refused to stay dead, and the living were slowly consumed by rot.

With the sun beginning to set, Damon blinked at the horizon, realizing he had no idea how time had slipped by so quickly.

It felt as if they'd only just left the ruined cathedral a few hours ago... yet a whole day had passed. Once again, he questioned whether it was just him, but his perception of time felt severely skewed.

Had they really spent an entire day dealing with Mist Knight Thren? He might've argued the point—if his current condition wasn't so dire.

They had returned to find Xander, Matia, and Leona surrounded by a horde of undead.

Without Thren's control, the creatures had lost all coordination and were swiftly wiped out. Afterward, Damon had insisted the party move—somewhere, anywhere to rest.

Valarie, or rather, the discarnate soul now possessing her own lips, had offered a shortcut. Obviously, there was no chance of finding a proper waypoint, so a temporary resting spot was their only option.

Damon gritted his teeth. That had been a terrible idea. He panted heavily, sweat streaking down his brow. He wanted to curse the pair of lips lodged in his shoulder but realized he had been the fool for trusting her outdated memory of Lysithara.

The city had clearly changed over the millennia she'd been sealed away.

Rawrrr!

A deafening roar thundered behind them, and Damon didn't need a second warning—he ran faster.

Something was chasing them. Something furious.

"This is all your fault, Damon—!"

Xander was running for his life but still found the energy to throw blame.

Damon was appalled. "My fault?! You should blame Valarie! The stupid pair of lips is obviously the one to blame!"

Evangeline gritted her teeth. "Shut up and run! We have to find a place to rest before sunset!"

Valarie's lips curled into a smug smile. "That's right, you ungrateful children. Respect your elders."

Evangeline howled, "Shut up!"

Valarie bit her own lip—though that was all she had—and muttered, "This one is quite rude... she must be related to Damon."

Sylvia clutched the supply bag tighter as she sprinted, the wind whipping through her white hair. Why did these things keep happening to them?

Earlier, on Valarie's guidance, they'd stumbled across a potential resting place.

Damon, being Damon, had noticed a larger, more luxurious building nearby—something that looked like it had survived centuries of abandonment with minimal decay. Evangeline had warned him not to get sidetracked by worldly desires, and in response, she got a full lecture on privilege. She was used to it—didn't believe a word of it.

Sylvia bit her lip. They'd been played.

Damon was a parasite who knew how to get people to do what he wanted. He spun a sob story about living on the streets, eating rotten bread from gutters.

They all knew he was manipulating them, but the story was just sad enough to work.

In the end, Leona had declared she wanted the building before Damon could stake his claim, which meant the entire party had to help her take it. She insisted.

Sylvia sighed. She didn't even care where they slept anymore.

She vaulted over a broken wall just as a stream of acid blasted past, the ground trembling from the massive, raging abomination behind them.

Matia leapt, freezing the acidic pool ahead into a thin icy path. She kept running, though she longed to fly—but her wings were gone.

They really shouldn't have gone into that house...

The building had a biometric lock—one of the innovations brought in by the Outsiders from their mysterious realm. Valarie had claimed they were a Type Seven civilization, but even the ancient scholars of Lysithara hadn't unraveled the full truth.

The Outsiders remained a mystery.

Not that any of that mattered to Matia—not then, not now.

They had expected some big boss lurking inside. Instead, they found something... wrong.

Matia jumped over a shattered pillar as the sun dipped even lower.

The house did have a monster, just not one they'd expected. It was a malformed creature at the first-class advancement tier.

It couldn't see. Its body was coated in mucus, and it had cried when it saw them.

Damon had been so disgusted that he cut off its head on sight—for trespassing in his property.

Even though, technically, the thing had been there first.

That had been Xander's argument.

The creature had been hideous—teeth on its chin like a beard, a gaping mouth, and eight mismatched eyes. Its body was twisted and hunched, supported by three crooked legs instead of four. It looked like some god's failed experiment—or perhaps a prototype for life itself.

Much like the creature now chasing them, only bigger. And far, far uglier.

They weren't fleeing from its appearance. They were fleeing because it was a Rank Three monster—its chest heaving with vengeance after returning home to find its young slain.

That's why they were still running... even with nightfall fast approaching.

Damon hugged his sword as he ran, his body feeling like lead. "Valarie! Which way?!"

The lips smiled coldly. "Now you need me? After all the things you said? Take it back."

Damon sneered, sweat dripping from his brow. "Just kill me... I'm not taking anything back."

Evangeline dodged another acidic spray, the roar of the beast echoing behind them.

She smacked the back of his head. "Apologize. Your ego is not going to get us killed."

Damon bit his lip, the wind rushing past his ears. "Fine... I apologize... that you feel that way."

"Damon—!" the others all yelled in unison.

He raised a hand. "Fine, fine! You were right and I was... less right."

Valarie sneered. "He doesn't mean it."

Sylvia gritted her teeth. "We don't have time for this. Take it, or we leave you to melt in acid."

Valarie sighed. "Fine. I'm the teacher, I'll be the bigger person. Learn from my forgiving nature, boy."

"Go left. You'll see a small bridge—it's enchanted. Once you cross, its body won't be able to follow. The magic keeps it from breaking."

They followed her instructions, rushing under a narrow ashen bridge. Once, it had been a street—they could see broken carriages scattered beyond. There were also barricades and traces of military activity.

As they crossed, the monster tried to follow, slamming against the barrier—but the runes flared to life, holding strong. It failed to break through, releasing another acidic blast in frustration.

Damon exhaled, chest heaving. "Let's go find a place to rest..."

Chapter 348: Heart Of War

Damon was already exhausted from the day, but this was par for the course with his party.

After all, they had spent a whole week fighting their way out of the Whispering Forest.

Why would they expect Lysithara to be any different? They had long since grown past the point of being weak, frightened teenagers in a world that obviously wanted them dead.

They had been given an option: adapt, or be removed. And they had adapted. They had grown—though partially in a direction of madness, weighed down by invisible scars that magic couldn't heal.

Each of them carried this trauma.

Damon didn't believe in therapy, but he knew that after what they had experienced, the mental health quartermaster would certainly have a handful.

At this point, they were comparable to actual war veterans—just without the military discipline.

That said, Damon was sure his other party members hadn't seen it all. He'd never been on an actual battlefield, but he had seen the remains of one years ago—and it was hell.

Damon didn't even bother praying to avoid ending up on one. He was certain that if he lived long enough, he would see one... fight on one.

This was Soltheon, the war continent. This was the world of Aetherus—a world that worshiped the Goddess of Doom, the Lady of Unending War.

And by the glory of her domain, Aetherus would never know peace.

As for who the enemy would be, Damon didn't know. Maybe demons. Maybe other goddess races. Maybe the temple. Perhaps even visitors from another world.

Most likely... all of them.

He wasn't being bleak. It was just how life was. It was perpetual war. Life was hell. A struggle from the moment you are born.

You must breathe to live—is that not a struggle?

You must eat or starve—is that not a struggle?

You must suffer joy, just so you can learn pain.

Is that not a struggle?

Life had always been hell. It was the same for all.

And on top of that cruel cosmic design, you had to deal with human cruelty.

He chuckled bitterly amid the last rays of sunlight, the buildings casting long shadows over them.

"What do you find so funny, boy..."

The pair of human lips on his shoulder asked with a degree of curiosity.

Damon shook his head at Valarie's question.

"It's nothing. I was just thinking about life..."

Valarie's lips pursed, then curled into a small smile.

"Ahh, I see. My student is contemplating the meaning of life. Well, you see—"

"I have that answer. It's meaningless." Damon cut her off.

Valarie went quiet for a moment, her voice suddenly becoming serious.

"That is a very bleak outlook on life... A philosophy one so young shouldn't have to adopt. Life is difficult, yes—but you should look on the bright side. Take me for example—I can still smile, even though I am only a pair of lips... and had suffered untold years sealed away with rot."

Damon sighed. He wasn't trying to get into a philosophical argument. He was just answering her question.

"I know my life is good," he paused, glancing at his surroundings. He was in a ruined, ancient city—a death zone with many horrors. Could he even say that anymore?

"Well, my life was getting better..." he corrected himself, "but as you can see, I'm still struggling. Isn't that the meaning of life? To struggle... even when you want to end it all... to keep your bleak possibilities alive because you fear the unknown finality that is death."

Damon looked up, over the tall spires casting their shadows across the city.

"Death is peace, but we all fear it. Life is war, but we can't let it go... what a contradiction."

Valarie sighed.

She had listened to this young boy, who had barely lived at all—only sixteen years—but was already weary and tired of it. Had he not learned the joys of life?

While they may be fleeting, they were the small lights that allowed one to withstand years of misery.

"Life is just a turbulent ocean with small islands of joy. Finding those islands... that is what we call life."

Damon glanced at her. She continued in a softer whisper.

"Mindset and philosophy shape the class a person awakens to. You have a very bleak philosophy... one that sees death as a form of release. You glorify it... you seek it. You defy and reject life because you see it as misery. But still, you anchor yourself to it..."

Damon remained quiet.

"Your first class must be related to death. It's something that shaped you. Did you lose something? Someone? Death must have been the beginning of why you despise life."

He didn't react, but she was somewhat right. Death was the beginning of why he despised life. His parents' death had changed his view of the world. He wanted to commit suicide—but didn't go through with it after seeing that epitaph.

His own death had taught him to accept suffering—and defy it.

Valarie pressed her lips together.

"If I may... can I know what your class is?"

She couldn't help herself. She had only known him for a day—it felt longer, but still, a day. By her nature as someone from Lysithara, she desired knowledge.

She simply wanted to know.

Damon paused for a moment. His hesitation came from his paranoid nature, but he accepted.

"My class is Death Dealer."

"A merchant in blood... and a dealer in death."

Valarie's lips twitched slightly before parting again.

"A shift in mindset or philosophy will affect your second class. You aren't far from getting there... all of you..."

She paused, as if recalling something horrible.

"It's here in this world... hidden from us... affecting all of us with this desire for war. Conflict Pillar. We will never know peace... as..."

Damon's eyes widened, as if she had just given a clue to some great secret.

"What... what did you say?"

Valarie's lips paused, as if confused.

"I... I... what was I talking about...?"

Chapter 349: Pillar Of Conflict

"What are you on about..." Valarie's voice echoed out from her lips. She sounded confused, as if she didn't know what Damon was talking about.

Damon looked at her with an edge of suspicion, though he had no reason to be.

Valarie was just a discarnate soul, possessing only her own lips—that was all there was left of her.

She had spent centuries sealed off with rot, her body decaying. Even in death, she was not liberated.

She remained self-aware as time passed by in that dark cathedral, rot consuming her bit by bit.

Any person would have gone mad from that.

Valarie did not—or at least, not in any obvious way. But Damon knew her memory was fleeting.

She forgot conversations and faces, only recalling them when there was external stimuli or a trigger to remind her.

Even so, Damon had to know.

"You mentioned the pillar... you said something about war and conflict. You said 'conflict pillar' just now..."

Damon's voice was louder than during their earlier philosophical exchange about life. His party turned around, their faces now fixed on him—and on the pair of lips resting on his shoulders.

Valarie's lips pressed together in visible confusion.

"What are you talking about? I was trying to tell you not to have such a bleak outlook on life... you're still young—"

"No, not that. You said something..." Damon cut her off with a flicker of irritation.

"Hmm. I did..." Valarie paused, as if trying to dive deep into a memory that lay buried.

"You said 'conflict pillar'..."

She was silent for a few more seconds.

"Well... never heard of a 'conflict pillar'..."

Damon sighed. He was about to give up on the conversation when Valarie suddenly spoke again.

"But I do know of a pillar of conflict..."

Sylvia's eyes sparked with a flash of surprise.

"A pillar? I've heard about—no, I've heard someone mention it..."

Damon tilted his head and glanced at her.

"You know what it is?"

Sylvia's head dropped.

"Erhm... no..."

Damon sighed. The sun had already dipped lower, but they weren't far from a place to rest.

"Who did you hear it from?" the question came from Evangeline, who looked exhausted from the day's trials.

Sylvia looked away awkwardly, reluctant to speak. She had a feeling they might find it unbelievable... though she didn't doubt they would believe her.

"I heard it in the academy..."

Matia narrowed her eyes.

"Someone in the academy told you about this 'pillar of conflict'?"

She shook her head. "Not exactly... no idea. Just heard—well, saw something similar."

Damon narrowed his eyes. Where could she have heard something like that? He turned back to his shoulder, where Valarie's lips remained.

"What's this 'pillar of conflict'?"

The lips twitched.

"I don't know. I think I heard it from an outsider..."

Damon's gaze narrowed. Things had just gotten more interesting.

He hadn't cared much before, but now? Now he did—especially if it had something to do with the mysterious visitors.

This information might be important to him and Lilith going forward. The more ancient secrets they pieced together, the better their odds against the Temple.

Maybe they could even leverage this knowledge. After all, the Temple had a habit of quietly disposing of people who knew too much... or spoke the wrong names.

"What is it, then?"

The question came from Leona, her voice cutting through the air.

Valarie groaned.

"I can't recall... I only remember a visitor called Unnoticed Singularity mentioning it..."

Damon's eyes thinned. He had expected answers from Valarie, but it seemed she had none—not now, at least.

Still, he'd gleaned new knowledge. Valarie knew the names of some of the visitors. So far, she had mentioned three.

The latest being this Unnoticed Singularity.

Damon didn't know what kind of entity one had to be to carry such a name. And frankly, he didn't want to find out.

He turned back to Sylvia, who might hold a clue—or at least a way to find it, with her strange journey book perpetually floating at her side, hidden in plain sight.

"All right, Sylvia. Where did you hear about the pillar of conflict?"

Sylvia held her elbows, as if recalling something painful... something traumatic. She took a deep breath.

"I heard it from the Demon Lord Ashcroft."

Damon glanced at Evangeline, who raised an eyebrow. Both of them wondered the same thing: was she delusional?

Ashcroft was a myth—a dead one, even in his legends. How could someone whose very existence was debated have spoken to her?

Leona pulled out a water bag, her expression worried.

"Here, Sylvia, have some water. We'll rest soon..."

Xander sighed, rubbing the bridge of his nose.

Sylvia finally understood the misunderstanding.

"Ah—no, that's not what I meant."

Damon glared at her, frowning. She'd better have an explanation. He didn't want to believe she met something as terrifying as Ashcroft...

There was a saying about him.

One doesn't encounter Ashcroft. One survives Ashcroft.

Sylvia took a deep breath.

"I saw a memory... one that belonged to the dark spirit, Rashi Ignath. It was in the Verdant Continent—a battlefield. I saw the memory of when Ignath was born..."

She shuddered.

"It was horrible. Blood and death everywhere. Tears... pain. In that vision, Ashcroft was there. In that memory... he whispered something about finding a pillar."

She paused. "That's all. I didn't see the rest because you rescued me... and freed me from Ignath."

Damon nodded. That made sense. Still, it didn't bring them any closer to knowing what the pillar of conflict actually was.

Just a name—and more questions.

He frowned, hesitating before speaking again.

"Sylvia... can you use your skill to find out what this pillar of conflict is?"

Sylvia paused, then nodded slowly. She could risk it. But first, she had to ask what the price would be...

She raised her head, ready to use her skill—

When Evangeline stepped between them.

"No. I won't allow it. This pillar of conflict sounds dangerous. It's too risky. How can you even ask her that? Her skill is too vile..."

She held Sylvia's hand tightly.

"Just wanting to map out the city, and her skill demanded her ability to have children in the future. What would it ask for with such a grand question?"

Sylvia fired back, "But I just want to know the—"

"No, it's fine," Damon cut her off gently. "I'm sorry for asking. I was shortsighted..."

He took a deep breath. Valarie had been silent since then, as if lost in thought.

He looked over his weary party.

"We're all tired. And it's dark. Let's go get some rest..."

Chapter 350: Unknown Progeny Of The Vile Thief

Damon leaned against the crumbling wall of an old house. The floor beneath him was coated in thick dust, and large portions of the structure had long since collapsed, leaving the place vulnerable to the chill night air.

The interior was pitch black. No one in the party dared to create a single light source, not even a spark, despite the biting cold that settled over the city once the sun dipped below the horizon.

They had learned their lesson during their first night in Lysithara—light only attracted something worse.

Damon could already hear them—familiar creatures, the grotesque ones the locals had once called lamp snatchers.

Well the locals were the lamp snatchers.

They moved across the ruined streets, their disfigured forms twitching and crawling as they hunted for even the faintest glimmer to steal.

Somewhere deeper in the city, he caught the distant growl and clash of nocturnal monsters locked in a deadly skirmish. Another night hunt.

Damon was on first watch—alone. The others were asleep, huddled together in a tight circle, with Xander lying a little further off, respectfully distant from the girls.

They might've looked asleep, but Damon knew they'd be up in a flash at the slightest wrong noise.

He could've asked the party to travel during the night, but he'd avoided that—for now. Not until they understood the true nature of this city.

Yes, they had the Nightlight spell, which granted them night vision. But that wasn't enough. Three of them had the unfortunate habit of being flashy when they fought.

If they wanted to avoid causing another city-wide disaster, they needed to avoid drawing attention with light.

Not that Damon needed light. He was just fine in the dark.

Leona had offered to keep him company during his watch, but he'd turned her down. She was his friend, sure... but his first friend had always been his shadow—even if it had a tendency to drive him mad when it got hungry.

He smiled faintly, eyes drifting toward the ground where the living darkness twisted behind him.

"Hey there, buddy... you and I haven't had time to talk much lately."

His shadow gave a lazy shrug, as if to say it wasn't a big deal.

Most people didn't talk to their shadows. Maybe it was a good thing Damon hadn't had time for his lately—it meant he wasn't alone anymore. He had friends now. A team.

Even so, his shadow was still his shadow. It would never leave.

At least... he hoped not.

Damon smiled in the pitch darkness where he sat, brushing a bit of dust off his armor.

"I got a new skill... isn't that something?"

His shadow placed a hand over its chest and puffed it out, brimming with smug pride.

Damon chuckled. "It's called Shadow Storage. Don't tell me you put in a good word for me with upper management."

The shadow looked even more smug.

He remembered the first time he'd seen Lilith store items in a hidden space linked to her stigmata. It had looked so useful—so seamless. He'd half-jokingly asked his shadow to do something similar for him.

He hadn't actually expected results.

Yet here it was.

Damon opened his system panel, noting with some irritation that his mana pool was dwindling and his shadow energy was low.

"I need to devour more enemies... or corpses."

Easier said than done. Most of the bodies in Lysithara were too old, and any fresh ones were usually taken by scavengers long before he got to them.

Still, he focused on the new skill and tapped the name. The panel expanded.

[Skill: Shadow Storage]

[Description:]

This vile thief was reviled by all—hated by the true gods, despised by the true demons, and loathed even by the amoral Old Ones. The capricious True Dragons could not abide his presence. There was nothing he would not steal—divine or mundane—bloodlines, knowledge, magic, skill, abilities, even the essence of souls. All that caught his eye became his, hidden away in a palace of crystal. There he birthed his vile progeny—the worst of them became the Unknown God.

[Effect:]

Store any object within a shadow spatial pocket.

The greater your shadow, the larger the storage space becomes.

[Cooldown:]

0 sec

Damon stared at the screen, a wave of confusion washing over him.

Just when he thought he was beginning to piece things together, something else unraveled it all.

The line about the vile thief was fascinating... but it wasn't what unsettled him.

No—it was two very specific things.

It wasn't the mention of true demons. Nor was it the True Dragons. It was the "crystal palace." Valerie had said something once—about how the Ascendant Armors had been forged using a method from that place.

But that wasn't what bothered him most.

It was the claim that the Unknown God was one of the progeny of this vile thief.

That didn't make sense. Not at all.

He remembered the poem—the one about the Weeping Star. He was absolutely certain the Weeping Star and the Unknown God were one and the same.

The verses echoed in his mind:

"...The Weeping Star came first, and the god who gives names devoured its light. All names that followed were lies."

"...The Weeping Star came first, and the god with no name devoured its light. All names that followed were lies."

"...To speak his name is to invite him in."

"...So the goddess took it, carved it from the hearts of men and cast it into the void."

"...In oblivion, she bound them. In silence, she damned herself."

"...He called her Bride, but the veil she wore was never white—it was woven of false fates."

The god who gave names... hated his own name.

Oh, the tragic tale of the Abyss and his Bride...

If the Weeping Star came first—if he named everything—then how could he be the progeny of a thief?

"Why doesn't this make any sense..."

His joy at getting a new skill was drowned beneath the weight of the confusion.

Damon shook his head.

Maybe he hadn't interpreted the poem right. His knowledge was still incomplete.

"Mortals shouldn't try to understand the world of gods—or even try to apply our rules to them..."

There was likely an explanation. Something simple... or perhaps something beyond comprehension.

Either way, it didn't matter right now. He focused on what the skill could do.

This skill was going to be a looter's paradise.

This skill was about to make him very rich.

His shadow looked up at him, a faint smirk etched into its form.

Right... some of his skills came with consequences. But he was trying to stay optimistic this time.

The shadow shrugged, choosing not to tell him.

Let him find out on his own.

Besides... this one wasn't that bad.