

## Shadow 651

### Chapter 651: Nature Of World Dungeons

It was an impressive display, no doubt about that. It was flashy and grand, and it made sure the image of a powerful empire filled with hidden dragons and crouching tigers remained intact.

The common folk couldn't stop cheering from where they stood. Damon was mysterious, powerful, larger than life.

Knights and those who lived on the battlefield liked it. The emperor himself seemed pleased, and it was clear enough why he had mentioned Damon's actions in his opening speech, calling it the spirit of Valtheron.

But of course there were still those old crows and stubborn nobles who clung to tradition and couldn't stop badmouthing Damon. He didn't mind. After all, even they begrudgingly acknowledged his power.

However, Damon was now firmly in the eyes of potential competitors.

"Listen very carefully." Evangeline crossed her arms, standing in front of Damon with a serious expression on her face.

Damon leaned lazily on a stone railing with magic seals and runes carved into it. He seemed to be gazing down below with no apparent interest in what Evangeline was about to say.

"How do you think this thing works anyway?" he asked suddenly, his voice carrying a casual curiosity.

Evangeline frowned at his question.

Damon pointed toward the floating pavilions that hovered above a massive coliseum. The design beneath them resembled a miniature world, filled with all sorts of terrain. There were mountains, rivers, a ruined city, a volcano, caves, forests, and so much more.

Around the coliseum stretched thousands of stairs, wrapping all around. They served as common seating, broken up at intervals by dome-like structures reserved for those who lacked the authority or wealth for a floating pavilion.

Evangeline sighed. "You're not going to listen, are you..."

She walked toward him, her boots clicking softly against the stone floor, and stopped at his side. Together they stared at the miniature world below.

"This is the passage to the world dungeon owned by the Valtheron Empire. This dungeon has been here long before even the capital."

She nudged him with her elbow, eyes narrowing playfully.

"Do I have your attention now?"

Damon chuckled, reaching out to pinch her, only to come to the disappointing realization that she was clad in armor. Evangeline smirked at his failure, a small snicker escaping her lips.

He chuckled. "Touchè, Eva."

Evangeline smiled lightly. She quite liked moments like this, even if he got on her nerves.

"Right, where was I... This area was built around the world dungeon. It was a good place to decide who got in."

"You remember what world dungeons are, right?" she asked, just to make sure he was actually listening.

"Ahh, I do. Professor Tunpick's class on space and lesser dimensions." Damon narrowed his eyes slightly, recalling the lessons.

"A lesser dungeon is a small world that is autonomous but not independent of the main world. That is to say, these worlds are still part of Aetherus."

He took a deep breath before continuing, his tone turning thoughtful.

"Tunpick is one of those scholars who opine the nature of world dungeons as shadows of the main world. Similar, but drastically different depending on the one you find yourself in. They might be complete with life, or desolate and empty, or even unbuilt—that is to say, just chaos."

Evangeline twisted her lips, unimpressed. "I hate how you have a know-it-all side."

Damon shrugged, feigning carelessness. "Well, I was sort of a failing student. Unlike you fools, I actually, unfortunately, studied the second-year material."

Evangeline ignored his jab. "Then why is everyone after the world dungeons?"

Damon's eyes narrowed. His tone lowered. "Do you want an honest answer, or do you want what they teach us?"

Evangeline tilted her head, confused at the distinction, then asked innocently, "Honest, I guess."

Damon leaned closer and spoke in a soft whisper, words that shouldn't have been said in this place.

"It's the Unknown God. The worlds inside a lesser dungeon are divergent worlds, so he exerts a lot of control there. That's why."

Smack!

Evangeline smacked him before he could say more, her gauntlet striking the side of his head.

"Shut up. There are a lot of people here who have superhuman hearing."

Damon scratched his head where she hit him, grinning sheepishly.

"Ahhh, it's just a theory by some scholars who claimed to have studied in the Demon Continent." He shook his head.

"There's a book on that in the academy library. The book is sort of about discouraging those theories. You know, you can't tell what's heresy if you don't know what it looks or sounds like."

He smiled suddenly, reaching out to lift her chin, her golden eyes locking with his dark ones, like the sun staring into the abyss.

"Don't worry. I'll do a lot of things and piss off a lot of people, but I'll stay out of the Temple's hair."

Evangeline closed her eyes helplessly, exhaling softly. "That doesn't put me at ease."

Damon chuckled. "Anyway... a world dungeon is a miniature world with a lot of rare resources and treasures not found in our world, including elixirs, due to its divergent laws which are laxer and more open."

His voice drifted as a thought struck him. His gaze slowly lifted toward the sky.

Laxer laws... Didn't the goddess seal away the world of Aetherus? Nothing comes in, and no one goes out.

Valarie had said those in the seventh class should naturally be able to sense the world beyond the realm where the gods live, the open omniverse and its countless realms.

Yet no one in his world even thought of leaving. No one could.

"Those who have reached the fourth class and higher cannot venture into a world dungeon without completely destroying the entrance."

Evangeline heard him mutter and nodded. "Yeah, that's why this is a game for those of us who are not in the fourth class."

Damon narrowed his eyes. "The laws in a world dungeon are lax...."

He fell into thought.

'Doesn't that mean you can escape this cage if you could stabilize its entrance, or even enter the world dungeon...'

Damon chuckled softly. No, that was unlikely. If escaping the world of Aetherus was that simple, then all the wise and powerful sages and legends throughout the ages would have used that method.

'A world dungeon is like the main world. There is a threshold of power it cannot carry. If not, why else would the outsiders not be able to fight beyond the seventh class, when they are actually infinitely more powerful?'

Damon had a feeling he was close to something. But like the mysteries of the Unknown God, the Goddess, and the true being, any more theories would be pointless without a complete picture.

He needed facts, not conjecture.

Evangeline glanced up at him, brushing back her hair. "It's almost your turn to give a speech."

"Damon..." she added more firmly.

He glanced at her. "Ohh right, right... any advice for me?"

She glared at him. "Would you listen?"

He smirked. "No."

#### Chapter 652: Who Wrote This

Damon found himself standing in front of two familiar faces. The first was a green-haired woman, the second was none other than Kael.

Of course, the woman was Professor Emeralda.

He narrowed his eyes, his expression clearly unimpressed.

"Ermh... hello professors... what's this about..."

Emeralda smiled gently, her face beaming with warmth.

"Ahhh, Damon, how have you been... it's been too long..."

Damon rolled his eyes, his tone flat.

"I saw you in the academy just the other day. What's this about? You guys are acting weird."

Emeralda nudged Kael sharply. He sighed, clearly dragged here against his will.

"We prepared the speech you're going to give. Please, and please, do not speak your mind. Just read off what we give you."

Damon raised an eyebrow, staring at them with suspicion, while Emeralda quickly pulled Kael to the side.

"You're supposed to say something nice first, ease him into it..." she whispered harshly.

Kael closed his eyes and exhaled, his voice resigned.

"That would not make a difference... let's just hope for the best..."

Emeralda turned back to Damon with a small, polite smile.

"Evangeline, I'm sure you explained everything to him, right?"

Evangeline, who was also present, sighed deeply, looking tired.

"I tried..."

Kael glanced at Damon, who was staring at them with a deadpan expression.

"Hmmm, seriously... am I really that type of person..."

The two professors narrowed their eyes, their expressions dead serious.

"No, you're far worse. Let's see... you burned down the Evil Forest... you killed a professor... and now you've somehow convinced Renata and Matia to coerce the other students into starting some strange cult in support of you."

Damon bit his lips, his jaw tightening.

"Okay... I'll read the speech... my goodness, false accusations against me are spreading all over the place."

They didn't even bother to grace his words with a response.

Damon walked out, leaving them behind.

Emeralda sighed, rubbing her temple.

"Why won't he take this more seriously..."

Evangeline narrowed her eyes, her voice carrying quiet weight.

"He can't. He won't take it seriously enough because there really isn't a threat for him."

She clenched her teeth as her voice lowered.

"I think it's because he's normalized being in pain and constant dread. Now that there's none, he doesn't quite know how to live without it..."

The two professors glanced at her with raised eyebrows.

Evangeline felt her cheeks flush.

"I... I... that's just a guess of course, don't mind me."

However, she didn't think she was wrong. Damon was used to being alone. He was used to being in pain, and constant dread was his companion. He was used to always struggling through pain and growing from it. Maybe he didn't know how to live because he was too close to death.

She shook her head.

'No, I'm overthinking this. He's just being a loose cannon as always.'

Naturally Damon didn't really think so. However, if he heard Evangeline's words, he would tell her she was overthinking.

Damon was about to make his entrance, but before he did, he picked up his pager.

"Renata... is it ready..."

Her calm voice came through, filled with the same fanatical fervor of one who worshiped the Dominator.

"Yes, my lord, it's ready."

"Good, good."

At the center of the grand pavilion, where representatives were supposed to give their speeches and address the hundreds of journalists, a figure emerged. This figure was, of course, not Damon. She descended from the sky.

As soon as she appeared, she drew her sword and stabbed it into the edge of the floating pavilion.

Raising her hand, stairs of ice began to form, leading all the way down from the heavens.

The audience fell silent at this display. After everything that had happened, they were eager to see what the festivities held next.

However, the organizers of the event were well aware this was not part of their arrangements, but they couldn't stop it.

When the ice stairs were done, the ice fairy clad in armor flew away.

"What... just happened..." one of the masters of ceremony asked, his face pale and confused.

His supervisor rolled his finger at him, a gesture that meant just go along with it.

He nodded stiffly.

Yet nothing more happened. No one came out.

Until half a minute later, Damon's figure appeared at the bottom of the stairs. He began to walk up the flight of ice steps, his cloak of shadows flowing behind him.

Renata, who was the planner of this event, picked up her pager while glancing up at an airship hovering in the skies above.

"Now."

The sounds of fireworks exploding echoed through the skies, flower petals falling in a dazzling cascade as Damon solemnly walked up the stairs of ice.

She glanced at the seating area for the students of Aether Academy.

As soon as she looked at them, a young man with a black eye and a bruised face screamed out rigidly.

"WOW, WHO IS THAT HANDSOME AND AMAZING PERSON."

Another student with a bruised face stood up rigidly, glancing fearfully at Renata.

"WHY, IT'S OUR LORD AND SAVIOR DAMON GREY."

This time it was a girl with a swollen cheek who stood up, her eyes puffy from crying.

"He's... he's... he's so handsome... I... I want to marry him... but I'm so ugly so I can't "

Some students looked confused.

"Huh, what's gotten into you guys? It's that bastr—"

Before he finished his words, he was cut off by a random slap across the face.

Renata raised her hand ever so slightly.

The other students of the academy stood up, clapping furiously with forced smiles on their faces.

"He's amazing..."

"We love him..."

"Damon Grey, marry me..."

Damon was so moved as he solemnly reached the top of the pavilion and stood before the podium, his face projected across the large seating area, hidden by his hood.

'They love me... they love me so much... I knew it, Renata... I knew keeping you around was a good thing.'

From where she stood, Renata had a beaming smile that practically said, leave it to me, my lord.

Damon glanced across the massive area. He cleared his throat and raised his hand.

Everywhere went silent.

He reached into his shadow storage to bring out the speech that had been meticulously written for him by his professors and Evangeline.

"I am Damon Grey, the vanguard of this great empire's youths... and today I will be giving a small opening speech to encourage my peers."

Damon glanced at the first page of the speech.

"Huh... what is this... I'd never be caught dead saying any of this... respect my peers... we should do our best.....fight fair.... who... who wrote this..."

Damon flung the papers away with a scoff.

Clearing his throat, he raised his chin proudly.

"Ahem, ahem, ahem. Citizens of Valerion... nobles, commoners, champions, and idiots who signed up thinking this would be fun..."

"I have bad news... it won't. This isn't a festival. This is war. And only those willing to bleed will walk out of here."

Professor Emeraldal coughed up blood and passed out. Kael caught her with a sigh, shaking his head.

"I knew it. This will haunt me in the faculty meetings..."

The crowd erupted into murmurs. Journalists began scribbling and capturing images.

Seras's blade chuckled in her pavilion.

Chapter 653: He's Honored

"So this is Damon Grey... he's bolder than I imagined."

Lilith glanced at her grandmother, who was smiling at Damon with an amused twinkle in her eyes.

"Hmmm ahhhh..." Lilith held her face with her palm, her cheeks flushed crimson.

"He is quite interesting... I can see why you're so smitten with him. Girls your age always like the contrarians, the ones with a rebellious streak..."

Her grandmother teased with a gentle laugh.

Lilith bit her lips, lowering her gaze.

"I'm... not smitten..."

Her voice was soft, though her flushed expression betrayed her.

Lilith's father sighed, saying nothing. He still wore the same tired expression with the bags under his eyes, watching quietly.

'So that's Ranar's son ...'

But he wasn't the only one looking at Damon, who was clearly trying to make a statement before all present.

Cassian leaned slightly toward the Grand Duke.

"Should we..."

"Jahahah! That's my boy out there!" the Grand Duke roared with laughter, slamming his feet against the ground.

"Look at him, showing them who's boss. This is how a man should be!"

Cassian wisely shut his mouth. Clearly, the old man was encouraging this kind of behavior rather than restraining it.

"Well, who wasn't wild in their youth..." Annalise muttered under her breath, her eyes following Damon with faint amusement.

On the floating pavilion of the Moonveil royal family, Sylvia giggled like a little girl, her soft, distant gaze fixed on Damon. Her mother watched helplessly, while her father glared with growing irritation at the young man in the distance.

Damon had already captured everyone's attention before his speech had even truly begun.

He raised his hooded head, his movements deliberate.

His voice rang out cold and serious.

"Now, they tell you the War Games are about honor, glory, courage. Hah. Let me tell you a secret. War has never been about any of those things. Honor doesn't mean anything when you lay dying on the battlefield."

The air seemed to thicken, and murmurs rippled faintly among the crowd.

"War is about killing. War is about who can walk out of the flames still breathing.... That's why I'm going to make one simple fact clear to you. So listen up."

He raised his voice, the words striking like a blade across the silence.

"I don't care if you're a noble or a commoner. I don't care who your father is, how much your family is worth, the size of your land, or how expensive your armor is. If you face me, death is not just a possibility. It's a promise."

The crowd suddenly went silent. Nobles and commoners alike froze, staring. Damon was making a bold declaration, stripping away the invisible shield of nobility. He was making it clear that if they crossed blades with him, he would kill them regardless of who they were.

"So, to my rivals out there, to the swordsmen, the mages, the beasts in human skin... come at me. I don't care if you're stronger, faster, or shinier than me. You bleed the same color. And I'll make sure the dirt remembers your blood."

The silence deepened. Damon knew exactly what he was doing. He was challenging the untouchable nobility who held power to oppress the adventurers, who were forbidden to kill noble heirs even in battle.

The whole setup disgusted him. Two enemies could face each other on the battlefield, yet only one side was not allowed to kill because of fear of retaliation.

The murmurs swelled louder.

"Life and death are nature's law. War is a product of the Goddess's law. Yet we live in a revolting culture where some lives are worth more than others on this battlefield."

His eyes narrowed, a faint smirk tugging at his lips.

"But make no mistake. If you cross me, if you stand in my way, I'll show you the truth about what a War Game really is."

Damon chuckled softly, and a chilling killing intent spread outward, his shadows spreading through the pavilion floors and walls. Those destined to face him felt their bodies turn cold.

"Some of you may die, but it's a sacrifice I'm willing to make."

He smirked casually, spreading his arms wide as if mocking the entire stage, as though he were receiving a king's welcome.

"Let's skip the speeches, skip the parades, and skip the boring rules. Let's just... start the damn games already."

He lowered his hands, his voice echoing in finality.

"Let the Goddess decide our life and deaths."

The whole crowd was silent, stunned into stillness. Not a word was spoken until one adventurer glanced at his peers. Slowly, he began to clap. From the corner belonging to the adventurers and commoners who had no status, roars and cheers broke out like thunder.

The nobles sneered, some laughing mockingly, some cheering, some jeering. It was a tough crowd, divided in opinion, but Damon didn't care.

The journalists eagerly scribbled notes, their quills scratching furiously across parchment.

The master of ceremony hurriedly stepped forward.

"We are opening the grounds for questions!"

The journalists turned immediately to Damon, the center of the stage.

"Can we ask a few questions, Lord Ascendant?"

Damon raised his hand casually.

"One question per person."

A journalist in the front row spoke first.

"Young Lord Ascendant, this is your first War Game. The world is watching. How do you feel stepping into such a stage?"

Damon shrugged his shoulders.

"How do I feel?... Hungry. I skipped breakfast."

Laughter erupted from the adventurers and commoners. Nobles groaned, shaking their heads, while Cassian buried his face into his palm.

"Young Lord, the Grand Duke himself named you vanguard leader for the parade. How does it feel to carry such a burden?"

Damon lifted his hand lazily.

"He was honored..."

The Grand Duke coughed into his hand, trying not to laugh, while Cassian glared at him with irritation.

"Ahem. Ahem." The old man cleared his throat, feigning composure.

"Do you believe you will win the War Games?"

Damon chuckled, tilting his head slightly.

"Was there ever a doubt?"

A female journalist held up her notepad, raising her right hand.

"We heard you received your golden ticket from the legendary Seras Blade herself. The world needs to know... what's your relationship with her?"

Damon paused, his eyes flicking toward Seras Blade, who sat in her pavilion with a chilling smile curling her lips.

From the corner of his eye, he saw Duke Cassian shaking his head vigorously, his expression saying plainly, 'Don't do anything strange.'

Damon chuckled, ignoring the warning.

"My relationship with her... well, I'm not her student or anything like that. I guess you could say I'm in the kind of relationship where I know how soft her rear feels."

The arena fell into dead silence.

Cassian facepalmed hard, taking a deep breath as a radiant sword of light appeared in his hand. He was ready to fight Seras if he had to. The journalists, and anyone with even the faintest inkling of Seras's brutal reputation, turned toward her pavilion with visible dread. Some had already begun fleeing to take cover.

Seras's lips moved.

Then she chuckled.

Then laughter erupted from her lips, echoing out across the arena.

"Hahahahahaha... ahhhh..." She wiped a small teardrop from the corner of her crimson eye.

"That wasn't bad. But I'm still not impressed. You're going to have to do a lot more than that. Though... you've just raised the bar a little higher."

Damon looked up with a sigh.

"Really... hmmm. You're more patient than I thought you'd be. How have you still not gotten a—"

"I believe we should begin the grand event. We haven't time to waste," Cassian cut him off sharply, stepping forward to the edge of his pavilion.

He turned to the imperial pavilion and bowed respectfully.

"Your Majesty, I humbly request the continuation of the ceremonies."

The emperor's gaze lingered on Damon for a moment, his expression unreadable.

"I suppose so. It seems this War Game will not be a dull event."

Chapter 654: Go Forth And Destroy

Abellona smiled softly. She didn't see his face, but there was no doubt. That person... that man... the bastard was alive after all.

The emperor had officially announced the beginning of the war games. However, before the actual event started there was a small tradition that needed to be honored.

It was a small tourney where people showed off their strengths via aptitude tests. It was supposed to be a way to allow nobles and the audience to know those who had a high chance of winning the war games.

Naturally, it was completely optional. However, to motivate those who would participate and to build hype, the empire had a special reward for those who won.

It wasn't money of course, so she was sure he would not be interested. However, she still hoped he would join.

The reward for each category's victory was actually a flower.

Of course, these flowers weren't meant for the winner. They were something the winner would be allowed to give to any lady present. To put it plainly, it was given to the fairest lady of them all.

Abellona didn't care about this. Throughout the years, many people had given her such flowers.

Though this year... it suddenly mattered to her if she got one.

There were so many great dignitaries here, nobles and rulers from other nations.

Members of the Church were also present, surprisingly including the Inquisition.

People like Father Dantalion, the Witch Hunter. This man was ruthless. He was known to have killed and tortured hundreds of people. He was feared even by demons.

Father Dantalion, the Witch Hunter.

"An inquisitor...." Abellona muttered under her breath.

A high cardinal was also seated with him. In fact, it seemed this high cardinal was none other than Aurelius Venn, the Smoldering One.

She winced, biting her lips. Two of the Temple's most extreme fanatics were the representatives this time.

It was like the Temple hadn't come for ceremony, but to fight.

'Former head inquisitor Aurelius Venn... now turned cardinal... and Dantalion the Witch Hunter. Is this about Ashcroft...'

Abellona bit her lips. "They can't drag me away for questioning... I'm a princess... though... it's still a possibility."

She sighed, looking at the arena.

'Suppose I have one more reason to compete... I should stay in the public eye and maybe off-world for a while.'

Abellona stood up. She had been planning to join the war games anyway.

She walked to the front of the imperial pavilion and stood before her father's throne.

Kronos glanced at her.

"Granted."

She hadn't even asked. However, she didn't need to. She bowed and walked up to him, whispering into the emperor's ear.

His eyes flickered.

"Are you sure..."

She nodded firmly.

"Yes, father. I am positive. It seems he truly did not die. However, I can only confirm if I can see the face under his hood."

The emperor narrowed his eyes, staring far across to the other side, to another floating pavilion where the Grand Duke Brightwater was smiling softly at a white-haired young girl who seemed a little nervous.

"I'm afraid my hands are tied. Being emperor doesn't make me free to act, Abellona. It simply means I have to keep a lot of unstable elements together while hoping everything doesn't go to shit."

She winced when she heard her father curse. It seemed even the emperor was under some degree of pressure.

The four dukedoms always did whatever they pleased. While on the surface it looked like the emperor controlled everything, the truth was he was merely the head of his own domain, and the dukes were far more autonomous.

"A small spark could bring it all crashing down."

He held his daughter's hand, his grip firm but weary.

"You understand why we need to stay united and maintain the status quo."

Abellona nodded.

The emperor closed his eyes, whispering only to her.

"We have enemies without, in the name of the demons. And within, we have the Temple and the one who has ruled in the shadows."

"Abellona... I must give love to my people and think of what allows the continued existence of the empire."

No one else could hear their conversation due to the emperor's power. But Abellona understood her father's worries.

Valtheron was a difficult place to rule. With everything he had to maintain or destroy, and the constant wars, it was a heavy burden.

"Then what do you suggest, father?"

The emperor sighed.

"We are growing weaker as a household. The dukedoms are isolating us, and they have been for many millennia. Their ties with each other are stronger, both political and blood."

Abellona was aware that those in the dukedoms could not mix blood with the imperial family. But that was because the ducal houses had made this rule.

The emperor leaned back in his chair, his eyes distant.

"For now, we need to make the smartest decisions."

Abellona truly understood, even so...

"If we only maintain the status quo, how will we ever move forward? Our ancestor took the bold step of crossing the Doom Continent to Soltheon. She overcame impossible odds and even faced the Wicked Prophet. Father, I understand where you're coming from, truly I do..."

She felt her heart beating like it was going to burst. She had never questioned her father's wisdom before.

"But if we do not take a leap of faith because we fear what we have to lose, doesn't that mean we've already lost?"

Abellona lowered her head, then raised it to face the emperor directly.

"It's not just about what we stand to lose, but what we hope to gain."

The emperor chuckled softly.

"Hmm. My daughter has grown. You now challenge my words."

She bowed her head.

"I... I apol—"

"No, that's fine. What we stand to gain... what do you wish to gamble on? The world is uncertain, and it seems I am growing old..."

The emperor stared into the distance with a blank expression.

"I wish sitting here and gazing into the distance could allow me to see the future, but even with an attribute like time, what I see is uncertain..."

He held his daughter's hands again, his gaze softening.

"You were born under an omen of destruction. However, I did not see that as a curse. Sometimes we must destroy to allow the creation of something anew. Abellona... go forth and destroy."

Abellona's eyes flickered. She nodded deeply.

"Yes, my father... my emperor."

The emperor watched his daughter's back as she walked away, his voice low and distant.

"I wonder what awaits us all in this future that I cannot see."

#### Chapter 655: Legacy Of Cowards

The feeling of a deep coldness spreading was an unfamiliar sensation to Renata. However, without knowing why, she suddenly saw something that looked like an actual expression on the face of the taciturn Matia Faldren.

It was almost a glare. Renata was certain the gaze wasn't directed at her, so she turned around.

There, behind her, was a man. A fairy man. His presence was cold like winter, his expression even colder. His gaze passed over Renata as if she didn't exist.

He was like winter itself harsh, unforgiving.

This man was Matia's father.

"You've really grown bolder, girl... to think you would dare ignore my summons."

Matia's expression remained almost still, but Renata noticed a subconscious tremble in her hands, one she had never seen before.

She had died and been brought back as a shadow, but even death did not erase this fear.

In the depths of her memory, in her fogged mind that looked like a frozen ruin where fragments of Matia mixed freely with the ruined fairy, she remembered.

Right. This was her father.

"Speak when you're spoken to, girl."

She opened her mouth... but no words came out. She closed her lips again. She said nothing.

He narrowed his eyes. With a single step he crossed the distance. Renata only felt the cold wind rush past her, blowing her hair.

Matia stood still like an ice sculpture.

He reached for her dark hair with clear disgust.

"What is this... what is this disgusting thing? Did I permit you to grow your hair out?"

She didn't react, only standing still.

The loud cheers from outside reached her ears, but none of those people had any business with her, nor could they see her. Even if they could so what.

"Hah... how audacious. You killed your brother, the least you could do was keep his memory alive. But instead, you became this."

He gestured at her with disdain, the coldness in his gaze shifting toward her wings. The weight of it made her lower her head slightly, a surge of emotion stirring in her chest.

Memories began to flood her mind of a frail twin who resembled her, her weaker, sickly sibling who had always been there to comfort her.

The one who had given her his wings.

"Disgusting. Do you see how disgusting you are, girl?"

Faldren shook his head with a sigh.

"You understand I must punish you for what you've done. You decided to join that reckless, wild vagrant commoner. What can I expect from a woman? You spread your legs for the first fool who gives you the slightest attention."

He slapped her, sending her stalwart form flying into the wall with a heavy thud.

Renata moved to attack him, but he waved his hand, freezing the very air. She was suspended, as if time itself had halted around her.

Snow flakes flying in the air.

"Stay out of this."

Matia stood up. Her face, pale as snow, now bore a red mark. But her expression remained taciturn, as if she hadn't just been struck. Slowly, she walked back to where he stood and faced him once again.

"... Did you fancy yourself a knight? You are a wretched woman. A lowly creature. What else can you be? You cannot carry the legacy of generations of warriors. So what if you have a little ability with weapons? If you were a man, your meagre tricks would be better. Your nature as a woman is the reason you are trash."

He slapped her again with the back of his hand, her head snapping to the side. But this time, she didn't fall. She stood her ground.

Slowly he closed his eyes with a sigh, as though weighed down by disappointment.

"It is unfortunate that the world saw that you are a woman. But... I, we, can improvise. You will continue to dress as a man. Cut that filthy hair, and dye it back to its original color."

He turned away, his cape swaying as he moved.

"Come."

She didn't move. His brows twitched.

"Are you deaf, girl? I said come."

Her mouth opened and closed, as though struggling to put her grievances into words. Finally, after a moment, she said all she could her voice carrying the storm in her heart the fear, the anger, and the desperate desire to be acknowledged.

"No."

Her cold voice was gentle, like a snowflake falling slowly from the heavens. It was like waking up to find the world blanketed in snow after a storm.

"What did you just say?" His voice was furious.

Snow after a storm was beautiful... but it was also deep and cold, burying the world beneath it.

"I used to think you were a great man. Powerful. But now... all I see is how small you are. You are strong, but strength that does not know how to be gentle is weak."

This was the longest string of words Matia had spoken since becoming a shadow, since she had died.

No this was the longest she had ever spoken to her father.

Still, she forced her soul, her shadow, to burn. Memories and personality traits fused, forming faster and faster.

Her eyes glowed blue. Her wings carried the chill of winter.

"I've met someone who is strong, and broken, but he still has the strength to smile at those he cares about. He is strong enough to be gentle. How could I ever have thought someone like you was strong?"

Her father's eyes grew colder.

"You dare speak back to me?"

Matia did not back away. She stepped forward, standing directly before him.

"You think because I am a woman, I am inferior. I only have one thing to say to you and to the ancestors who left this legacy. I want no part in a legacy of pathetic weaklings."

She raised her hand, pointing it at him.

"Remember this. I am not yours to command. I am not Matia Faldren, the weak daughter who only cowered. Maybe not today, but someday you will fall before me."

He chuckled, though anger burned beneath it. The beating she would receive would be out of this world. He would correct this behavior.

"And who are you supposed to be, then?"

Her pale face disappeared under the dark metals of her armor as it surrounded her body.

"I am Ruined Fairy."

She waved her hand. Ice spears formed and shot toward him.

With a casual sweep of his hand, he destroyed them, the ice shattering into fragments.

When the frost cleared, she was gone. He couldn't sense her anywhere nearby.

"Hmm. It seems the girl has learned a few new tricks."

He turned to find Renata glaring at him. She had finally forced his power to zero.

She chuckled coldly.

"It seems you want to create a political blunder, your excellency. The journalists outside would love to hear how a Norrath-based noble assaulted a noble of the Empire."

He waved his hand dismissively.

"I was just leaving."

Chapter 656: Comical Name

Damon didn't really know what happened between Matia and her father, but he did sense her enter his shadow again.

However, he was more focused on other things. His gaze was directed at Kadelas Moonveil, who was seated with his queen and daughter.

The pavilion was hovering in the air like any other, with knights stationed on it.

Damon turned away. He really should learn to let things go, but forgiveness wasn't something he knew how to do. Frankly speaking, as someone who preached and lived by vengeance, that was just his way of life.

However, the question was how he would deal some degree of damage to Kadelas, who was a world apart from him in terms of power.

The answer was simple. Kadelas was a man, and men had weaknesses.

They had emotions. They could get angry, and anyone who could be angered could be rage-baited.

'Hmmm... what's to stop him from turning me into meat paste....'

The answer to that question was simple. It was none other than the eye of the people. This was a public place in a foreign nation. Kadelas wouldn't kill him here.

In fact, if Kadelas had been able to deploy even one person at the fourth class, then maybe Damon would be dead right now.

The fact that he couldn't was due to the Empire, and maybe Damon's Deathless skill.

Still, Damon wanted to at least meet him. Maybe a normal person would want to avoid meeting an ancient elf in the seventh class who wanted them dead, but Damon wasn't most people.

His gaze turned to the floating pavilion where the Temple representatives were praying over the competitors and invoking the goddess' blessings. But Damon didn't really feel anything from it.

He knew how the goddess' power felt. She had, after all, destroyed him once.

So basically, those people were just borrowing her name to deceive the masses.

After the prayer, the excitement grew to a fever pitch. It was finally time for the tourney to begin.

Different stages formed, ready for different challengers to appear. Naturally, this wasn't compulsory. It was just a small warm-up and an opportunity to impress a fair maiden.

There were automatons for duels, which were called weapon trials. Here you battled against a mechanical golem with your weapon of choice.

The next would be the beast arena, where you fought magical beasts in chains, proving your might.

Endurance was needed for any long campaign. Thus there was also an endurance gauntlet, which was actually just a glorified obstacle course.

Finally, there was the most restricting event, due to its requirements on one's aptitude, but the one that required the least strain:

The magical aptitude test, which included showing off your mana levels. That was about it.

Naturally, Damon could already see some figures moving, eager to show off their might, especially after his speech earlier.

"Hmmm, you're bolder than I thought...."

Damon leaned on the railings, smirking faintly.

"But you're still not impressed, right?"

Seras chuckled softly, her gaze calm.

"I've had my eyes on some of the more interesting fellows. Though... none of them seem..."

"As handsome as me. I know, I get it from my father. That guy pulled quite the beauty. If she wasn't my mother, I'd be jealous." Damon touched his face with a vain smile.

"Ahhh, none of them are as frivolous. But I suppose you are somewhat easy on the eye. You'll make a beautiful corpse."

Damon smiled, his tone playful.

"Necrophilia.... kinky."

His gaze shifted back to the arena, watching the competitors who wanted to win a flower.

There was a young man of elven origin. Damon remembered him as the youth from the Halls of Steel.

"Velora Nyxfall. He's a dark elf and an assassin. He's the second-generation student of the old man from the Silver Glades, you know... after his first student disappeared."

Damon kept his expression impassive. 'Was she talking about Back to Back?'

He was from the Halls of Steel, and if not a direct heir, he wouldn't really have their heirloom.

"Hmm. He has a shadow attribute... guess I finally meet someone with my attribute."

Damon watched as the youth shot down automatons with fast, precise arrows.

The other competitors couldn't match him, so he quickly secured himself a flower, winning the automaton trial.

Naturally, Damon was curious who he would give the flower to. After receiving it, the elf glanced around, then walked to the elven pavilion belonging to the Moon Glades and went straight to Sylvia.

He gave the fair elven princess the flower as cheers erupted.

She glanced at him but accepted the flower nonetheless.

Damon continued to watch. The next trial was endurance: a massive magical obstacle course with hundreds of challengers.

The one who really stood out was a fast and agile beast-kin girl who moved like a swift ghost, her monstrous strength evident in every leap.

"Who's that?"

Seras crossed her arms over her chest, her gaze steady.

"You have such disregard for your rivals. These are the people you challenged, you know."

"Third-year student of the War Academy in the Wild Continent. Ishara Fang. She's quite the agile one... and strong too."

Naturally, to no one's surprise, she won, securing herself a flower.

She didn't give it to anyone. Instead, she tucked it into her hair.

Damon didn't really react.

"No one from the Empire is winning. Aren't you going to compete?"

Damon glanced at her with a thin smile.

"Do you want me to win you a flower?"

Seras pushed her hair to the side, her eyes gleaming.

"I can put that on your grave when I go to visit."

"How generous of you. You'll still visit the grave of the guy you killed."

Damon's gaze shifted to the next stage, where measuring devices were being set up to test mana.

A young man stepped out with slow, steady steps. He wore mage's robes and carried the crest of a certain academy from the Magic Continent.

"The Eldorian Magical Academy..."

Seras smiled.

"Yes. I suppose a student from Aether would know them. That is... Magnus Trombone, the magical prodigy."

Damon narrowed his eyes.

"Why such a name..."

Seras narrowed her eyes in return, her lips curling.

"You're about to see why."

Damon suddenly felt a colossal wave of mana spread from the young man's body, the scale overflowing with magical energy.

"Damn."

## Chapter 657: For The Academy

Impressive.... That was an understatement of the century. Calling or even saying someone with a total mana of thirty thousand was impressive was an understatement.

Fun fact when you advance, you gain more mana. But absorbing monster cores doesn't actually boost mana; it only refines what you already have, making it more powerful and increasing the overall quality of your power.

Damon himself was actually on the cusp of another class, but that wasn't the point. The point was that having this much mana was unfair.

Thus Damon's reaction.

"Damn.."

Seras narrowed her eyes, then smiled faintly, her lips curving with a knowing amusement.

"Hmmm, what an impressive fellow.... Even I didn't have that type of mana."

Damon was about to say something when he heard a booming laughter coming from one of the floating pavilions. His eyes followed the sound, landing on the crest above. It was the crest of the Eldorian Magical Academy.

"Hahahah.... Ahhh, I bet no one in the Aether Academy has such aptitude for magic. What do you have to say for yourself? It seems my students will be taking the win this time."

Seras leaned her cheek lazily on her arm, looking up toward the pavilion with a smirk.

"That would be the old man who is the head of the Eldorian Magical Academy. He's still salty about me beating up all his students back in the day."

Damon crossed his arms, remembering right. She was a student of the Aether Academy back then.

"I see, senior.... Reliving your glory days must feel good. You know, some people peak in their youth, then live an unassuming life as an adult."

Seras rolled her eyes playfully.

"When you die, I'll miss that casual confidence of yours.... But maybe you've forgotten I'm something of a hero these days, so I'm still at my peak."

Damon muttered under his breath.

"Show off."

Seras chuckled softly, feeling his jealousy. At least she won this round.

However, it seemed she wasn't the only one in a winning mood.

"Trash.... Absolutely trash. My Aether Academy could never be caught dead bragging about a trash mana level of a mere thirty thousand."

Damon opened his mouth in shock. Wait wasn't that the voice of the Aether Academy headmaster? Since when was he so... so foul-mouthed?

"Yeah, that's about it. The two of them never get along. In fact, we at Aether just have a natural rivalry with those in Eldorian.... It stems from the War of the Five Sages back in the day."

Seras decided to give Damon some history.

He shook his head with a helpless sigh.

"Hmmm, people really hate that we're the best, and the Eldorian Academy is trash. How can they compare to the great Aether Academy...."

Seras nodded in agreement. As a former Aether student, she was also an Eldorian Academy hater.

Their rivalry was legendary, and everyone knew it.

Naturally, as soon as the two headmasters' voices boomed across the arena, jeering at each other, the students on both sides began cursing at each other.

An Aether Academy student stood up, screaming at the top of his lungs.

"At least our student council president is hot! It will never be better for you Eldorian scum!"

"Yeah, I heard Eldorian Academy relies on potions made in magic labs!"

"Drug addicts all of them."

The students of Eldorian weren't taking it lying down. They were firing insults back just as viciously.

"I had a nightmare once... that I was an Aether student. I didn't sleep for a week."

A student beside him gave him a pitiful look.

"Oh my goodness, how traumatizing.... Are you okay?"

He wiped mock tears from his eyes.

"No... I'm still in therapy."

Another Eldorian student balled his fists, waving his hands as his voice cracked from yelling.

"These trash get their uniforms made by us! If you're so great, get your uniforms made here in Soltheon instead of our great Magic Continent!"

Naturally, the insults continued to fly as other academies watched with growing amusement. However, one academy suddenly stood up.

It was the Royal Academy.

"Yeah, Aether is trash!"

The students on both sides stopped and turned toward them.

"Who... who are these...." Eldorian students asked.

Aether students shook their heads in embarrassment.

"Sorry about those guys, they're from the Royal Academy...."

Eldorian students nodded with understanding.

"Ohh, I see. Sorry you have to deal with such trash."

The Aether Academy students waved their hands dismissively.

"No, no, it's fine. Don't mind them. Anyway, where were we... ahh yes."

"You can never beat great Aether!"

And the arguments continued. Of course, they were rivals.

The two headmasters were still slyly badmouthing each other.

The Eldorian headmaster sneered, stroking his long beard with disdain.

"I don't see anyone from Aether showing off their mana. You scared, old man?"

"I'm not that old, and you're not so young yourself with that mop beard," the Aether headmaster replied with equal venom.

The dignitaries and nobles present didn't interfere. They were well aware this was a long-standing feud between the two great academies. In fact, the other academies didn't even bother joining the argument.

The emperor sighed, pressing a hand against his temple as though already suffering a headache.

"That's enough.... If Aether has someone with that much mana, they are free to compete, or Eldorian will be declared the winners."

There was silence. Then the Aether Academy students froze for a moment, before all of them slowly turned their heads toward Damon.

Normally, if he was just a normal student, they would have started chanting his name, cheering him on for moral support. But this was Damon Grey.

The students and faculty exchanged glances, then one by one, they all made up their minds.

They had to do this. For the academy.

A student reached into his pocket, pulling out his pouch.

"I'm offering twenty thousand zeni for Damon Grey to shut this ignoramus up!"

Another student pulled out their pouch, then another. Soon, all of them were calling out bids, offering money and even their personal effects.

Damon, wearing his hood and standing right beside Seras, looked utterly stupefied. His jaw slackened, his eyes wide.

Never in his life.

And it wasn't just the students. Professors joined in as well. Emeraldalda, who had just regained consciousness, suddenly stood up and yelled at the top of her lungs.

"One million zeni... if you win!"

Kael sighed, raising his hand.

"I also offer a million."

Soon everyone from the academy was offering bids, embarrassing enough that even his own friends joined in.

Damon finally stepped onto the railings, his expression one of pure disbelief. His voice rang out over the chaos, appalled.

"That's enough!"

The students fell quiet at his tone.

"How can you people do this? I am a student of Aether Academy, and we all know I value the academy's honor...."

Everyone cheered, feeling moved by his words.

Damon cleared his throat, lowering his voice as he added casually.

"Please submit all payments to my secretary, Renata Malcrist."

"Ahem, ahem.... After all, we can't act like uncivilized animals when Eldorian is watching...."

Everyone looked at each other, then they all began to cheer again, moved to tears.

Yes, this was the son of a bitch they all hated.

Damon teleported to the center of the arena.

Chapter 658: Thirty Mana

Magnus narrowed his eyes. He was acutely aware of this person, Damon Grey. How could anyone not know this name?

Though he didn't know how he looked beneath the hood, he was certain of something... this person was crazy.

He had never seen anyone more deranged and bold in all his life. Damon was irreverent toward powers greater than himself, reckless in a way that bordered on madness.

However, Magnus was sure of one thing no one had more mana than him. This person should be no different.

Yet there was something about Damon's presence. Magnus was a sensitive person; he had to be in order to control so much mana. But what he sensed now wasn't ordinary control. It wasn't refinement. It was something heavier. It was better described as subjugation... no, domination.

It was as if Damon walked forward as the singular ruler of all. He dismissed everything around him because he was transcendent.

"What arrogance."

Damon didn't even spare the young man in robes a glance.

Seras cupped her hands together, her smile playful and cruel.

"If you lose, I'll carve 'trash' into your gravestone myself."

Damon chuckled coldly.

"You won't, because I won't have a gravestone. When I finally die, I probably won't even leave an intact corpse."

Magnus felt unnerved by his words. What kind of person would even wish such a thing upon themselves? More importantly, why was Damon speaking to Seras Blade so casually? Did he not realize she was a whimsical monster?

She could change moods in an instant and kill without warning. She was a monster...

One that was allowed to grow increasingly powerful.

Damon finally turned his hooded face toward the young man in mage robes. The boy had auburn hair and a pair of glasses perched on his nose.

He had a somewhat small build, but Damon realized he wasn't actually short; rather, he just looked like someone who needed the sun, maybe some grass under his feet, and definitely a good workout.

Damon didn't mistake that for weakness. He knew this type, this was a mage's build. A walking glass cannon. Fragile to the touch, but devastating when unleashed.

'Depending on how mobile he is on the battlefield, he could be a nuisance.'

Magnus kept staring at him before speaking.

"If it's not rude to ask... why do you wear that hood?"

Damon paused, surprised at how well-mannered the question was.

"You aren't going to throw insults? Aren't you disrespecting the academy spirit? Everyone here built it, I'll have you know. It's tradition."

Magnus looked away, irritation flashing across his expression.

"Yes, I can see that. Everyone is acting like juveniles, even our elders."

Damon rolled his eyes.

"This guy thinks he's better than everyone else. Or... are you just a sourpuss? You don't have many friends, do you?"

Magnus frowned, averting his gaze.

"I prefer to study and learn new magics. I don't have time for such frivolities."

Damon chuckled mockingly.

"Pfft. You're a loner. Hah."

"You don't have friends either!" someone from the crowd shouted.

Damon turned sharply toward the Aether Academy students. Clearing his throat, he waved dismissively.

"Ahem, ahem. Back to your question... personal reasons. That's why I wear this hood."

'If I catch the bastard who said that..'

"Hmm, I see." Magnus didn't push the issue.

He quietly recognized something they were alike. Both were walking their own lonely summits.

Damon walked up to the mana reader, his face hidden but his expression deadly serious beneath the hood.

"You're not bad, Magnus... thirty thousand mana. Not bad at all."

Magnus chuckled with a mix of disdain and swelling pride.

"Really now? What mana levels did the academy register for you?"

Damon sighed as the crowd on the side of Aether Academy cheered for him.

"Well, it's a little embarrassing. I really don't want to brag..."

He let out a dramatic sigh.

"Fine, fine, I'll say it."

"My academy mana record at the start of this year was... 30."

Magnus closed his eyes and nodded firmly.

"I see. So you are much like myself, with thirty thousand."

Damon tilted his head in confusion.

"Ohhh, I see where the misunderstanding comes from. I don't mean thousand. I mean 30. You know, three and zero. Thirty."

Magnus scoffed.

"You're joking."

"I'm not."

Magnus's hands trembled, his teeth grinding.

"Then why are you even here?"

Damon shrugged.

"Isn't that obvious? Aether wants to mock your academy. Why else?"

Magnus grit his teeth harder.

"Damn Aether Academy...."

Damon reached for the mana reader.

"But you know... that was at the beginning of the year. Right now... I want to see just how much I can squeeze out."

A suffocating wave burst from Damon's body. The wind went still. The light of the sun dimmed, swallowed by the deep shadows that coiled around him like a living storm.

Magnus's eyes widened. He felt the mana particles forming around Damon, thick and oppressive. His robes were pushed back by astral winds.

There was an almost dominating and suffocating will mixed with those shadows.

Damon touched the reader. Magnus's eyes filled with fear, awe, and confusion all at once.

The mana reader's surface flared greedily as Damon's circuits poured vast currents of mana into it.

His head throbbed from the strain of his wounded soul, but Damon pushed through. He would not hold back. Using his [5x] skill, he amplified his mana fivefold, just to flex his power.

The numbers began to climb.

The overseer's jaw dropped, his hand trembling as he read the results.

"Thi... this... mana... mana... 117,835!"

Magnus was frozen in place, wide-eyed and unable to blink. He wasn't the only one everyone was left speechless. Even Seras blinked in shock.

Magnus gasped.

"Ho... how... im... impossible..."

Damon smiled under his hood. His actual mana without [5x] was only 23,567. But none of them needed to know that. He glanced at Magnus, his tone almost playful.

"I have to admit, Magnus Trombone... you truly are quite the monster."

Magnus stood dazed, confused. Why was this monster calling him a monster? The gap wasn't even close.

Damon turned and walked toward the main pavilion. His steps were unhurried, his tone light.

"I think I'll be taking that flower. There's a beautiful elf lady I want to give it to."

Magnus's eyes followed his back, still wide with disbelief. His lips moved almost unconsciously as he muttered.

"Damon Grey... the Ascendant.... Who are you."

Chapter 659: Even At Your Age

A prodigy who had never really known defeat was more easily shaken than someone who had failed more times than he could even remember.

Magnus could only watch with trembling hands as Damon walked away from him, reaching the platform where he received a white flower.

Taking it into his hands, Damon paused.

"If I may... can I ask a question?"

The person who had given him the flower was an old imperial councilor. Stroking his beard, he nodded.

"Yes, you may, young one."

Damon's words brought the cheers down as the world was once again left to wonder what this person wanted to do.

"I can give this flower to whomever I please, right?"

The old man nodded, his robes fluttering in the wind.

"Yes, you may. It is tradition to give it to whomever you think is the fairest of them all."

Damon placed his hand on his chest.

"And no one would take offense... I am a commoner after all."

The old man raised an eyebrow.

"You are protected by years of imperial tradition, and the emperor is here. I doubt anything would come of it... you are safe."

Damon had a gentle smile under his hood.

"That's good to know... I have the protection of the empire, right?"

The old man sighed.

"Yes..."

Damon turned around, having won. With the flower in hand, he turned to the floating pavilions.

His gaze was first set on the Astranova family pavilion, where Lilith sat with her grandmother and father, looking very much like an otherworldly flower.

"Is he going to give the flower to Lilith Astranova?"

"Well no surprise there, most young men would want to impress her."

But Damon didn't move. He turned to the imperial pavilion, his gaze falling on Abellona who flashed him a knowing look.

Damon kept his calm, but in his heart he sighed.

'Well she knows... not that I was trying to hide. If she talks I'll say she raped me... I'm not giving her that ring back.'

He was prepared to fall on his knees and cry like a little girl if he had to.

In fact, he would even give visceral examples of how it happened.

Of course, he would have to blackmail her first... assuming she came after him. If not, he would just play the fool.

Next, he turned to the Brightwater pavilion where he saw Evangeline and his sister talking about something with Iris nodding frantically.

The grand duke was looking at them, trying to act nonchalant.

However, Damon didn't linger.

The students of Aether Academy were eager to see who Damon would give this flower to.

A girl glanced at another student.

"Who is he giving the flower to?"

The boy shrugged.

"How am I supposed to know? The suspense is killing me."

Professor Emeraldal glanced at Kael.

"Don't tell me he's wearing it himself."

Kael sneered knowing Damon well.

"I wouldn't put it past him."

However, Damon still didn't move. He was contemplating his own emotions, thinking more than he needed to. This wasn't hesitation, he just needed to get his thoughts in order.

Finally, his gaze turned to the Moonveil royal family pavilion.

With a single step, he teleported right in front of it. Jumping up, he used the Airwalk skill to step on the air until he was right in front of the pavilion.

Landing onto it, everyone held their breath.

It was clear that he was giving this flower to Sylvia Moonveil.

The spectators watched with keen interest... until one person recalled a rumor.

"Come to think of it, aren't they rumored to be close?"

Like a loose snowball, rumors began to circulate.

"Yes, I heard he once fought the dark spirit Rashi Ignath to save her."

"I also heard...."

The knights guarding the pavilion crossed their spears to prevent entry to the human. The elves watched him with a degree of disgust.

However...

"Let him in."

The voice of Kadelas ordered them to allow Damon passage.

The young man smiled as the world watched his first interaction with the rulers of the Moonglades.

Sylvia's eyes were locked onto him. Her immaculate white dress was woven with the finest silk, embossed with fine golden embroidery that reached her feet. She wore a white translucent veil, almost like a bride.

There was another flower resting beside her, which had been given by a young elf from the Halls of Steel. However, when she saw Damon walking forward, she tossed that flower to the ground, as if to make it clear that the flower Damon was giving her was all that mattered to her.

Kadelas' eyes were cold, his fist clenched. However, he did not act. His queen held his hand with her own, holding back the anger of the ancient elf.

Damon stood before the rulers of the Moonglades and made a small curtsy. It was a little shallow for people of their standing, especially from a commoner, but this was Damon.

"I have come to deliver this flower to the fairest of all elf kind."

He placed his hand on his chest.

"If I may..."

Kadelas' eyes glowed white, but his queen held his hand, smiling at Damon with her lips though her eyes were cold.

"You may, as this is the tradition of the host nation."

She was making it clear that if it wasn't the tradition of the host nation, she would not allow it.

Damon nodded and approached, walking past the last of their knights. His face was being projected all around the area using some form of magic technology.

Sylvia wore a sweet smile as Damon walked forward.

However... he stopped.

She watched him with wide eyes.

He stopped right in front of her mother. Falling to one knee, he took the queen's free hand and in a soft voice said:

"Daphne... it's been many moons since we last conversed."

Daphne's eyes widened, her mouth falling agape.

Kadelas was so confused he didn't even have time to register his anger.

Damon kissed her hand, placing the flower in her palm, her face turning pale.

She didn't even know what sound to make.

"Ae... jej... huh...."

Confusion. The great oracle Daphne Moonveil was confused.

Damon smiled, holding her hand clasped in both of his.

"Even at your age, I, Damon Grey, declare you to be the fairest of them all."

Kadelas finally reacted. A white beam of light appeared in his hand.

Damon was prepared and quickly stood behind Sylvia, who was swift to shield him with her wide-spread arms.

He poked his head out from behind her.

"Sir, this is tradition."

Chapter 660: Dromedary

Kadelas was furious. He wasn't angry because a young man had given his wife a flower and said she was the fairest elf of them all. No, he was angry because this flower had come from the son of a bitch who knocked up his only daughter.

This wretch had clearly come here with the sole purpose of provoking Kadelas.

He was using the Valtheron Empire's traditions as well as the eyes of the public to put Kadelas in a political chokehold.

What made this so vicious was the fact that Kadelas was fully aware he was being mocked and incited, but he was also put in two positions.

Swallow his emotions and act the part of a ruler, or commit a public and political blunder.

Either way, it was a loss for Kadelas.

What made this truly hateful was the fact that the reason Kadelas stopped wasn't because of nonsensical traditions or the public eye. He didn't care about those.

The real reason he stopped was because Damon had grasped at his one weakness.

His true weakness. The one reason Kadelas feared Damon's death.

What's to stop Sylvia from killing herself.

There, standing in front of Damon with her arms spread protectively, was his own daughter, his little girl.

No matter how much Sylvia grew, she would always be a child in her father's eyes.

Kadelas loved his daughter above all else, and that was why she was his weakness. The apple of his eye had been stolen by a wretch.

However, it seemed that wasn't the only thing. He could feel a few auras pressing down around him. They would act if he did.

The emperor, Kronos, who controlled time with his attribute.

The Singularity, Godwin Corbin Ravenscroft, who was also watching.

The Golden Sun, Damian Brightwater, who was already revealing killing intent, except not at Kadelas. His target was Sylvia. If Kadelas killed Damon, Damian would also kill his daughter.

And he wasn't the only one. Astranova, even Valefier, stood among them.

This boy had a few allies here.

"I got your attention now, your majesty... shall we have a chat...?"

Kadelas smiled coldly. He sighed.

"I have nothing to talk to you about, boy."

Damon smiled, walking forward from behind Sylvia.

"Hmmm..."

Daphne came between them, waving her hand. She dismissed the magic tech broadcasting to the outside world.

As soon as it was gone, Kadelas grabbed Damon's neck, raising him up, his hand threatening to crush his throat.

Damon let out a laugh.

This level of anger it was clear he had won.

Rage baiting

Kadelas released him at the behest of his wife.

She sighed, glaring at Sylvia.

"This is the man... you want to be with, Sylvia? You would turn against us for a person like this?"

Daphne closed her eyes dejectedly.

"You break our hearts..."

Sylvia bit her lips, feeling a little guilty.

Damon walked to Sylvia's chair, taking a seat.

"The thing about a forbidden fruit is the more you say no, the more you want it. I think because it's wrong, that's why we want it."

Kadelas tilted his head in disdain.

"So I'm supposed to say yes... to the man who ruined my daughter?"

Damon crossed his arms.

"Ruined? Or showed her a life beyond your suffocating leash?"

"And you tried to kill me. I'd say we're even."

"Are you open for a conversation?"

Kadelas closed his eyes. In his mind, he had killed Damon a million different ways.

His wife nodded at him with a slow, steady expression.

He sighed, walking back to his seat.

"Talk."

Damon glanced at Sylvia.

"Sylvia, mind giving us some space? Your parents and I have a very important topic to discuss, and I fear you are far too young."

She gave him a deadpan expression. However, her eyes lowered slightly to her journey book, which was floating in the air. Then she smiled.

"Hmm, fine."

Kadelas waved at Sylvia.

"Don't go far, Sylvia..."

Sylvia didn't object as they expected. She just left because Damon asked.

Daphne felt a pang in her heart at the sight.

"What do you want to talk about?"

Damon shrugged.

"Honestly, nothing. I just wanted to see the faces of the people who wanted me dead for no apparent reason."

Daphne chuckled, remembering he had ruined her daughter.

"It was a preemptive strike, among other reasons. And as an oracle, I have learned to nip problems in the bud."

Damon nodded, glancing outside. At some point, the ceremony had begun, and the emperor was giving a final speech before the arena truly opened.

"Fair enough. I like abusing my power as much as the next person."

He leaned back lazily, his tone mocking.

"Speaking of power, I brought you a little something. Didn't think I'd visit my in-laws without a gift, did you?"

Kadelas's eyes narrowed coldly.

"We are not your in-laws."

Damon chuckled, spreading his arms. The shadows moved, and a group of severed heads began to fall, bringing with them the stench of death and decay.

"I'm not sure if you recognize them, but these are the heads of the assassins you sent to kill me. Unprovoked, I might add."

Kadelas leaned back in his chair.

"So what, you're angry?"

"I'm not angry that you tried to kill me. I'm angry that you failed."

Kadelas clenched his fist. How could this young man make his hands seem tied?

"I'll be sure to succeed next time."

Damon chuckled darkly.

"That's the thing. There won't be a next time. I'll give you a warning. This is the first and last time you'll ever come after me."

Kadelas narrowed his eyes, a smile not quite reaching them.

"Are you threatening me?"

Damon shook his head slowly.

"Ooh, no. How dare I, someone so small, threaten the great Kadelas Moonveil. No... I'm warning you."

He looked at him firmly.

"I don't want to come between Sylvia and her family. If you and I clash, she'll be the one who suffers. I want to avoid that."

Kadelas glanced at his wife, then laughed.

"You think you are worthy of clashing with me? You, a brat at the second class?"

Damon didn't laugh. His expression stayed the same, his dark eyes swirling with an unshakable calm.

"I'm here, aren't I? You never thought I'd make it this far. Yet here I am. I'm still standing."

His deadpan expression silenced Kadelas.

"You cannot undo what you have already done."

Damon smiled, knowing Sylvia wasn't here.

"What if I can?"

Kadelas tilted his head.

"It doesn't matter. You can never have my daughter. I can't allow that... ever."

Damon looked out into the distant sky.

"I trust we can come to an agreement."

Daphne frowned.

"And what is it you hope to gain, assuming you can deal with our little problem or undo it?"

This was what Damon was hoping for. He had already gotten his revenge by humiliating Kadelas and making him feel powerless before him.

Imagine hating someone so much but being unable to act against them.

Damon glanced at the clouds.

"Is... is that a dromedary?"

"What?" Daphne replied, confused. Then her expression contorted into horror.

"It... no, it can't be."

The whole arena stopped.