

Shadow 661

Chapter 661: No Need To Be Rude

It was a strange sight. What else could you call it? Unusual even. After all, Damon wasn't crazy... at the moment. If not, then why was he seeing a dromedary in the sky?

Hmm. It was a strange sight indeed to see a flying camel.

The creature was massive, easily the size of a wyvern. Its body was covered with fur, and a large golden saddle was strapped to its back. Over the saddle was something like a tent covering, adorned with the finest of magical jewels.

The camel's eyes were dark like any creature's, yet instead of the calm one would expect from a normal dromedary, this beast radiated a fearsome aura.

Maybe it wasn't a well-known fact, but camels were actually ridden into wars, and they had a bad habit of biting people's heads.

This creature would do far more than bite your head. Its aura was vicious.

Damon felt a jolt in his heart when he saw it.

"That's... a demon."

There was a serious expression on the face of Kadelas Moonveil, his hand rising into the air where he pulled out a silver blade.

Damon had not seen such an expression on Kadelas's face before, not even when the elf had been angered by him.

Daphne bit her lips, magic seals appearing across her hands as her power stirred.

But it wasn't just them. Seras, who had been lazily watching the proceedings, was suddenly armed with two long swords. A helm with wings appeared on her head, and her armor glimmered silver, making her look every bit like a Valkyrie.

Everyone who had any power of substantial level was already outside, their auras flaring so high the color of the sky itself seemed to dim, each of them affecting the world in their own unique way.

The world seemed brighter around those of House Brightwater, as though the sun itself had descended into the world.

For House Ravenscroft, it was as if a black hole had opened, absorbing all the mana into its depths.

The entire place grew unbearably heavy. Damon felt it was difficult to breathe.

He sucked in a breath of cold air. It was obvious everyone was enjoying the protection of these powerhouses... well, except Damon. The closest powerhouse to him was Kadelas, and Damon knew very well the elf would never go out of his way to protect him.

'Damn petty.'

He endured it. He had faced horror before, so he had the resistance required. Besides, he wasn't their actual target.

The emperor, Kronos, was surprised as translucent ripples that seemed to distort the flow of time spread out above them. His gaze rose sharply to the sky.

"What brings Paimon, Lord of Knowledge and High Priestess of the Snake Temple? Is this a blatant violation of the peace treaty?"

The crowd, most of whom were ignorant of what the dromedary truly represented, choked as fear began to spread among them like a suffocating fog.

Yet no one tried to escape. Where could they run? This place was supposed to be the safest.

"It... it's a demon lord..." someone stammered in terror.

After all, those who lived in the world of Aetherus knew very well what it meant when one was called a demon lord.

These were disasters, the absolute peak of demonkind, the rulers of the Demon Continent.

Each demon lord was virtually invincible. And when one fell, another would claim their name and title, making it seem as if they had never truly died. For a long time, the public had even believed the demon lords were immortal, able to respawn like monsters in a dungeon.

"Eh... why... why is a demon lord here..." a man muttered, his body trembling.

Sweat poured down his face as it grew pale. Tears welled in the corners of his eyes as memories of devastation came back to him, the day the Grand Duke Brightwater had fought the demon lord Adramelech.

Those who were even within a hundred miles of that battle had been turned to cinders. The world had been perpetually scarred by unhealing, immolating light.

"Goddess protect us..." Another voice broke into prayer.

For many, praying to the goddess was all they could do. They knew the truth, if they fought here, there was no guarantee of survival. Even if Paimon were slain, anyone weaker caught between the clash would perish.

"Don't fear, the Temple is here! They will exorcize this demon!" a woman shouted, though her voice quivered.

Her eyes turned to the flying pavilion of the Temple, where the ultimate representatives of the will of the goddess stood.

How could they not be afraid?

The Grand Duke Brightwater clenched his glowing golden hand, his cape whipping in the wind, his gaze flickering toward his two granddaughters behind him.

"If you have come to die, we are happy to oblige."

From the Temple pavilion, the voice of the High Cardinal, Aurelius Venn, echoed out, carrying with it his draconian aura.

"Is this an act of war, Paimon? What brings the Lord of the Snake Temple here? Know that regardless of the outcome, we will retaliate in kind."

There was still no response from the dromedary above. Its massive form remained suspended in the air, silent and imposing.

Damon narrowed his eyes. He couldn't sense any presence at all. How Paimon had even made it into the capital undetected was a mystery. The capital was filled with wards and barriers.

Daphne bit her lips and whispered toward Kadelas.

"You can fight freely. The Valtheron Empire's barrier will go up in a moment, protecting everyone."

Kadelas's eyes didn't move from the dromedary, but her words made Damon relax slightly. At least his sister would be safe.

From the dromedary in the sky, a figure moved descending like a falling boulder from the heavens.

The figure landed on the ground with a heavy thud, shattering several meters of the arena floor.

Finally, the figure raised her head.

With a soft, gentle bow, she spoke in a calm voice.

"My apologies... I did not mean to be rude. It seems I did not think this through. Truly, I did not mean to offend."

The wings on her back folded and disappeared. Her eyes turned toward the pavilion where Kronos stood.

"For those who do not know me, allow me to formally introduce myself."

"I am Paimon, the demon lord who keeps knowledge, and prays to the Goddess of the Abyss in hopes that I may receive love from my creator goddess."

She curtsied elegantly.

"I am much like you... a faithful of doom."

Father Dantalion raised his hand, his body trembling with rage.

"Blasphemous demon!"

Paimon giggled softly, her voice carrying an eerie sweetness.

"No need to be rude...Father..."

Chapter 662: The Name Of Gods

Paimon was a demon lord. However, when Damon envisioned Paimon, this was not what he imagined.

In his mind, Paimon was a huge demon with six eyes, long wings, a massive tail, two grotesque heads, and very furry.

However, reality was quite the contrast.

Paimon was actually just a humble-looking nun with bat-like wings.

Her hair was covered with a beige habit, but the strands that poured out were blue, like the color of the sky. Her eyes were like the sea, deep and endless. Her nun's outfit was dark with white trim, her sleeves longer than usual, giving her a flowing, ethereal appearance.

She wore a gentle and polite smile, giving off a soothing aura, almost welcoming, as if you could confide in her and trust that your sins would be forgiven.

This was Paimon, the Demon of Knowledge.

As for why she was given that name, Damon had read that Paimon was a learned sage who had glimpsed secrets or magic bestowed upon whoever inherited the title of Paimon by the Unknown God himself.

Or was the knowledge given to the original owner of the name?

But that wasn't important. What was important was Paimon's role as a ruler and a religious leader. After all, she was High Priestess of the Snake Temple.

"What do you want, Paimon...."

She turned to Kronos, her smile still polite, her body showing no hostility.

"Like I said earlier, I come in peace. We do have a peace treaty after all."

Grand Duke Brightwater scoffed, his hand resting firmly on his sword of light.

"A peace treaty? I wouldn't go that far. What we have is an armistice, at best."

Paimon giggled softly. Her expression was serene, almost like that of a gentle maiden rather than a terrifying demon lord.

"That is still an agreement, and as long as it stands, I am a guest here."

"A guest is someone who was invited, not someone who fails to respect boundaries," Emperor Kronos spoke, his tone sharp, representing everyone present.

"Hmmm, that is true. In that case, my apologies. I did not mean to be rude. However...."

Paimon looked around with a charming smile, her eyes gleaming with subtle amusement.

"You're all having such a grand ceremony amongst yourselves but didn't invite us in the Demon Continent. Thus why I showed up."

There was a deep silence. Everyone was on edge, sweat beading from the sheer pressure of not knowing what Paimon would want.

Paimon raised her hand gracefully.

"Don't be so tense. I would never resort to harming the young. However, I think it's unfair to leave us out."

She placed her hand on her chest, her smile gentle, as though her words were nothing more than reason and fairness.

"That is why I took it upon myself to right this wrong."

She pointed to her dromedary in the sky. On its back, several figures stood looking down. Each of these people was young and full of vitality, their auras resting at the third class.

Young demons.

Paimon had dropped the gauntlet.

"For years, you have held these war games, claiming whichever child of the goddess races won was the greatest prodigy in the world, but you failed to include the Demon Continent. We are also children of this world, created by the goddess. We have a right to compete."

Kronos scoffed, his eyes narrowing.

"Leave, Paimon. This is no place for you and yours."

Paimon smiled mischievously, clearly having expected such a response.

"I see. You goddess races are afraid. I can understand that. After all, demons are the superior species. To us, you might as well be weaker."

She placed her hand on her chin, feigning thought, before delivering the final insult.

"That's why you never win against us in a war, even when it is eight continents against one."

Her words sent outrage through every heart. In the warlike world of Aetherus, this was the greatest of insults.

Damon crossed his arms with a serious expression.

'Hmmm. I didn't realize demons were ragebaiters too...'

However, Paimon had already inflamed the young members of the goddess races. Each of their prodigies stepped forward, glaring at the young members of the demon race, eager to prove themselves.

Well, except Damon. Ragebaiting of this level would not work on him.

Though he wasn't the only exception. His friends also didn't really care about the demons. Though they didn't like them, perhaps you could say they had built up resistance to petty insults and taunts.

Kronos chuckled coldly, feeling irritated by her words.

"You scheme something, deceiver. What is it? Whatever it is, I don't care. Leave. You will never get a chance to act it out."

Paimon sighed softly, shaking her head.

"I promise, I mean no harm. If anything, I come as a harbinger... a harbinger of omens to come."

She walked forward slowly, making sure she was visible to all.

"I came here in the hopes of letting the young demon-kin test their mettle against yours."

Her expression grew faintly worried.

"After all, we both know what is to come."

Everyone frowned, clearly understanding her words.

Paimon raised her hands, her smile widening faintly.

"The Dominator walks amongst us once more...."

There was silence as Kronos' eyebrows twisted. He already knew this. In fact, all those in the upper echelon knew it. To put it plainly, this was an open secret.

Kronos didn't want to show unease as the crowd began murmuring fearfully.

"Ashcroft... he's not real. The Demon Lord of Domination from the legends... he was invincible."

"He's a myth. But what of the prophecy...."

"Does this mean there's going to be another war?"

Paimon seemed to enjoy their panic.

"We do not know where Ashcroft is, what he looks like, or how powerful he is. Or rather, how much of his power he has regained. But Lord Ashcroft has never been known to be low-key. After all, domination doesn't hide... he rules. Arrogant and unbridled, defiant and unbroken."

She smiled faintly, her words carrying a finality that chilled the room.

"No one can defeat him."

Paimon extended her arms, pointing at the youths of both sides her left to the demons, her right to the goddess races.

"Let the young ones show us their mettle. Would it not be a good opportunity to see who will rule and who will fall?"

She lifted her head, a smirk forming on her lips.

"Let us have a glimpse into the future."

"Our future."

Kronos narrowed his eyes.

"Except if you fear you would lose...."

Kronos was no fool. Something was off. He would not agree easily.

"We accept...." The voice came from his side, from the Temple representatives.

It was Father Dantalion. His expression was filled with righteous anger.

"The young of our goddess race fear no evil. In the name of the goddess Minerva, we shall win, filthy heretic!"

Paimon lifted her face to see him. Her smile flickered, though it didn't quite reach her eyes. No one knew her thoughts, only the mask of her expression.

Kronos gritted his teeth, cursing the Temple under his breath. He couldn't say no now. He had to risk it all.

After all, the Temple had invoked the name of the goddess. Those fanatics... they had dared to speak her actual name.

"Very well then. Let the goddess' doom decide who will be victorious."

Paimon smiled, her wings fluttering faintly as her voice lowered into a chilling prayer.

"Then I invoke the forgotten name of the Unknown God. May we visit death upon you."

Chapter 663: Damon's Variable

Paimon's arrival immediately sped everything up.

The emperor held a short meeting with those in power, all while keeping a sharp eye on Paimon, who was casually eating grapes to the side as if she couldn't be bothered by any of it.

This was troublesome. Demons were troublesome. This was a powerful species.

A demon was one who had fallen into depravity, at least true demons. Except these were demon kin, meaning they were descendants of actual demons.

It was the same as the dragon kin species. They were also just descendants of dragons, able to be categorized as a different race.

By that extension, demons were more of a condition or status that turned you into a creature with characteristics different enough to define you as a completely different race.

This was the nature of demons. This race didn't spawn out of nowhere. It was the humans, the elves, the dragon kin, the beastmen, and whoever else that had become corrupted and depraved, turning into demons.

Their racial characteristics would change, gaining wings and horns... at least for the males.

It was troublesome because demons were powerful, both physically and magically. This was a race born with power.

"Hmmm." Damon bit his lips, his eyes narrowing in irritation.

This was annoying. He never got a chance to finish his conversation with Kadelas since the elf had left him behind.

However, seeing Paimon was a harsh reminder. This world had far too many powerhouses, and that was excluding the outsiders who were even more powerful.

He didn't know where they were, but it was evident they would return.

"I need to rank up soon."

But more than that, he needed to know. For now, the closest clue he had was Lazarak, or rather, the Tomb of the Lesser Gods. He still hadn't explored its levels and uncovered its mysteries.

Then there was Mugu....

Damon reached into his shadow storage and pulled out a potion. Looking at it, he bit his lips in hesitation.

'With the demons in the equation I can no longer predict what will come next... I should add an uncontrollable variable of my own... even if I may not use it.'

He took a gulp of the potion, and with no one watching, all eyes distracted by Paimon.

Damon's face grew increasingly pale. His shadow greedily sucked at his shadow energy.

Falling to his knees, he coughed violently, unable to stand. Forcing himself against the wall, he leaned back just as an identical version of himself emerged from his shadow storage. Except this version was completely uninjured.

This was his shadow clone, bearing ninety percent of his power.

Damon had created it for one singular purpose.

Well, actually for a few purposes. In the world dungeon, he had wanted to annihilate everyone. His injured main body did not have that power.

It was also a good opportunity to push his narrative. It was time to unleash the invincible demon Amon the Faceless into the world.

In the meantime, Damon would try to grow to the next rank.

"If I push it I can do so in a few days. I just need a lead on my next class."

He sent it back to his shadow storage.

However, more importantly, if he didn't need Amon, he could still use his clone to act as himself, though that would be unwise since he had nowhere to hide his main body.

He coughed again, wheezing, as the world spun around him. He had also weakened himself on the gamble of "what ifs." The way things stood, he couldn't beat anybody without taking another one of those Soul Blaze potions.

"Which means I can go all out two more times before my wounds heal."

By the time Damon was done, the emperor Kronos stood at the center of the arena, his hands open.

All eyes were focused on him.

Damon stood up, pulling his hood tighter over his face once more.

He leaned casually against a pillar, trying to appear nonchalant, but the truth was he was in pain. His hands trembled, and he shook his head when he realized he was struggling to keep them still. He had no intention of letting Kadelas or anyone else see any weakness.

So he stepped into the shadows and teleported, falling deeper beneath the arena where he had a clear view of Kronos. His breathing grew ragged, and he found the hood stifling. Pulling it off, he pressed a trembling hand to his chest.

"Damnit, Paimon... you ruined my plans."

This was all on him though. He hadn't accounted for this variable. Therefore, he had to prepare as best he could.

He took out the Staff of Carnage, its destructive capabilities still charged.

This was another trump card, and he began mentally going through his arsenal.

'Well, it's no fun if I just destroy them... I'll give them all a little handicap.'

Kronos raised his hand high.

"Warriors of the great races of the goddess... the time has come once more. For ages we have dealt with the demon scourge, and our power has been without contest.

However, it seems these few years of peace have made the demons forget fear."

His impassioned voice lit a fire in everyone who wasn't a demon.

"They have come to challenge us in our home, full of naïve arrogance. We do not fear. We are children of war!"

The crowd of warriors, adventurers, and nobles roared, their voices thundering with fighting spirit.

Kronos was a ruler. He knew how to ignite the flames in people's hearts, how to turn doubt and fear into certainty and courage.

"These demons have come. They will not leave alive. Young warriors, I call you to the fields of glory! Come, raise your blades, face this darkness from the demon continent, and remind them why they fear!"

His hand pressed firmly to his chest, his voice booming across the arena.

"Let them remember this day forevermore as the beginning of the end. Let them remember this as the day demons bled, the birth of heroes!"

His aura expanded, saturating the entire arena. Space itself seemed to stretch with the weight of his magic.

"I call the mighty! Come forth and leave your mark in blood! Stand on the field of glory, becoming the heroes of today and the legends of tomorrow!"

As the arena opened like a great tide, hundreds of young warriors impassioned by his speech surged forward without fear in their eyes. The magic of the arena swallowed them, summoning them into battle.

Damon stood at the edge, glancing down, watching it unfold.

'So it begins... how anticlimactic.'

"This was just like the goddess races... wanting to settle everything in the most blood-soaked and warlike way possible."

Crossing his arms, his crown glinted under the dim light. His eyes, heavy with exhaustion, carried shadows beneath them.

'Let's hope this doesn't end like the Battle of Harlem Pass.'

[Authors note]

[Shout out to Joseph Akiyama for the wonderfully nerdy definition of demons; I liked it so much I decided to use it.]

[Don't forget to leave a review]

Chapter 664: So What

The battle of Harlem Pass was the first battle in the most recent Demon Wars, which ended in disaster for the goddess races, causing the demons to gain a foothold in their landfall invasion of Soltheon.

Damon narrowed his eyes, looking at Paimon. Something was off, he could feel it in his bones.

His face still pale, Damon decided there was no use waiting there. Whatever it was, he would figure it out, but standing still and second-guessing himself would not do.

Glancing at his shadow, he whispered.

"Are you ready, Matia?"

He saw her blue eyes glowing within his shadow, staring back at him, eyes filled with battle intent.

With a soft, gentle whistle he called out to his unique companions. A few seconds later, a squirrel and a raven flew onto his shoulders. Their soft sounds carried meanings he wished he didn't understand. His preparations were now completed.

"Ahhh," he gasped, letting out a small cough.

With a single step, he leapt down into the arena. His body was consumed by light, and when he looked up again, he was standing in a white realm surrounded by hundreds of young warriors.

There were so many people he couldn't even find his allies.

"Welcome, young warriors, to the Land of Glory. This is a secondary magical realm. I shall now explain the rules."

Damon narrowed his eyes, turning himself into a shadow as he spread his perception outward, searching for his friends. He needed to find them first.

Leona had joined, Evangeline, Lilith, Renata, Xander, and Abellona. Excluding Sylvia, he wasn't even sure where she was, but....

"She must have taken the opportunity of me meeting her parents to come here."

He found them. It seemed they had the same idea to regroup with familiar faces.

The voice of the emperor boomed as Damon approached them.

"It has been brought to our notice that some of you youths feel like nobles have a special halo that guarantees favorable treatment in the war games...."

The voice, coming from everywhere, was cold.

"They do not. There is no mercy on the battlefield, and this is a battlefield. Now, the rules are simple."

The white realm began to change, the ground beneath their feet glowing with shifting colors due to magical seals activating.

"The fate of all those who wish to participate is now in the hands of the goddess. Those who have stepped inside can no longer leave, and neither can we go in."

Kronos' voice was cold, as though he had planned the potential deaths of the young members of the goddess race. But the truth was, he was actually doing it to trap the demon youths.

In his mind, he believed the members of the goddess race would put down their hostility to fight their great enemy.

At least it seemed so on the surface. His true reason was to prevent whatever Paimon was planning. She couldn't go in now.

"The objective is simple. The gate to the World Dungeon lies at the center of this artificial world. You will all have a fair chance to enter. Only the strongest will survive. To do so, you must find and collect medallions. The more you have, the greater your chance to enter."

His voice paused, taking on a sinister edge.

"You may team up or form groups, but know that your party can easily be a hindrance to the number of medallions you find. You may kill demons and monsters inside to obtain these medallions."

Damon narrowed his eyes. So that was it.

Creating a sense of urgency with an unknown number of medallions no matter how many you had, you would never know if it was enough.

'Therefore we have to find as many as possible, even if we have to kill to obtain them.'

Kronos let out a small smile on the outside.

"When I say demons, that includes the ones who just joined from the Demon Continent. Demon kin are worth an unspecified amount of medallions that can only be obtained by killing them."

He expected a reaction from Paimon, but she wore only a polite smile that revealed nothing. The lack of reaction made Kronos even more uneasy.

Damon looked to the side, where he suddenly noticed a small sphere floating in front of him. In fact, not just him everyone had one.

"We have deployed these magical recording devices from the Magic Continent. They will broadcast your situation to the outside, giving us visibility. Try not to destroy them..."

Damon chuckled.

'I'm definitely destroying mine.'

"There are penalties if you do."

After that, the emperor continued to explain the rules, terrain, and victory conditions.

However, the only thing Damon truly understood was simple. This was a battle royal in which killing the guests from the Demon Continent would earn more rewards, but the goal was to gather medallions and deliver them before the World Dungeon gate.

During this time, the battlefield would begin to shrink. The edges of the so-called combat zones would transform into abnormal mana regions, killing anyone left behind.

It would force everyone toward the center.

'When we get to the center, only the strongest will be left....'

Cruel, but expected of the goddess races. Forcing their children into such a harsh trial by fire was well in line with a warlike world such as Aetherus.

Finally, the emperor who had explained the rules spoke one last time.

"Many of you will die. That is a tragedy. However, those of you who remain will be the sharpest of blades. Only the strong can survive the perils of the World Dungeon. Those who survive but fail to reach the World Dungeon will return safely to the outside once the chosen heroes have entered."

With that, his voice disappeared. The circles beneath their feet began to glow brighter, though it would take some time before they were transported into the main battlefield.

Damon was about to go meet his friends when he heard a voice from behind him.

"Take it off, you wretch...."

He frowned. This voice was familiar.

He turned around and found the familiar face of Prince Waton though in his mind, Damon preferred to call him Prince Wagon.

"Prince Wagon."

Waton gritted his teeth, pointing at Damon's head where a crown glimmered faintly.

"How dare a mere commoner wear a crown! This is an act of lèse-majesté! By the glory of the emperor, I sentence you to death for high treason!"

His voice bellowed out so that everyone nearby could hear him.

Damon glanced at Waton, then touched his head.

Ahh, right. He had taken off his hood. Technically, the prince was right about it being lèse-majesté.

But.

"So what..."

Chapter 665: The Demon And The Fool

"At this point I'm starting to find this annoying, not gonna lie."

He glanced at Waton with a somewhat bored expression on his pale face. His strength was at an all-time low, but he could still have this fool killed by letting Matia and Ghost loose on him.

The question was, did he really want to kill this wretch?

The answer was yes, yes he did. However, no one here was a bigger fool.

The emperor had said all were equal on the battlefield, but what he failed to mention was the fact that noble retaliation usually happened outside the battlefield.

So, to put it simply, no one really believed him when he said there would be no consequences to killing a noble.

The question was, would you be willing to risk killing the son of the Valtheron emperor while he watched?

'Only a complete demon lord would do that... lucky for me I brought one of my own.'

"What did you just say?"

Damon shrugged his shoulders at Waton's question.

"I'd love to take it off. Been wearing this darn thing for so long my head hurts... but..."

He lingered, a sudden chill creeping into his voice.

"If I did, it won't end well.... for you."

Waton narrowed his eyes coldly, a smile creeping across his face.

"Are you threatening an imperial prince?"

Damon shook his head with a nonchalant expression.

"Wouldn't dream of it. Except right now, Your Highness... you aren't really a prince, are you? Mmm, you're just one of the thousands of young goddess race warriors who have come to die for glory."

He emphasized the word die, making it clear that Waton would most likely not live through this.

The ground beneath their feet was still glowing, and with the way the seals were clicking into place, it was evident they would soon be transported.

"Right, you challenged me, didn't you? You and some elf from the Moon Glades... it seems this place restricts combat. Let's fight inside the arena."

Waton glared at Damon, his expression filled with anger at Damon's nonchalance.

"You are very arrogant for a commoner. I don't even need to do anything just the people who want you dead are more than enough. However, I will warn you again... take off that crown. That's an order."

Damon was getting irritated. He really didn't need this right now.

He didn't want to summon Matia out of his shadow storage, since there was a possibility that if they got teleported, they would be separated from each other. And truthfully, he wasn't in good shape.

This place was crowded with thousands of people, so this small area's commotion wasn't really that big of a deal. It was only a ripple in an ocean of madness.

The urge to slap Waton appeared in his mind, and right as Damon was about to move, he felt a constricting force around him.

'Hmm, I knew it. Violence is not allowed before teleportation is complete.'

That explained why Waton wasn't attacking him either.

With no reason to argue like little girls, Damon reached into his shadow storage and pulled out a chair.

Seeing him relax, Waton grew furious and began hurling insults, which Damon just ignored. He said nothing.

To better his mood, Damon even pulled out a bottle of wine from Abellona's stash and poured himself a glass, drinking it casually.

His easy, almost smug expression made Waton more furious. After a few more minutes, the prince simply stopped, glaring at Damon in silence.

Damon sipped his drink, chuckling softly as his eyes gleamed with amusement.

"Are you done, Wagon? Or do you want to continue embarrassing yourself? Suppose this is why your father thinks you're a failure."

Waton's hands trembled. His heart sank.

"My... my father doesn't think so."

Damon smiled, having found his weakness.

"Is that so? When was the last time he entrusted anything of note to you? When did he last praise you, tell you he was proud? I bet never."

Waton's hands shook harder.

"I... that's not true."

Damon sighed, pulling another chair out of his shadow storage and placing it beside his.

"Come, have a seat."

Waton hesitated.

"You know, I thought you were just a shallow character. I was right... but that was because I didn't see what was beneath the veil. I didn't think about it too much, but now I see...."

Waton trembled. This was insulting, but he couldn't refute it.

Damon stood up, ushering him toward the chair.

Why didn't he think of this earlier? He was weak right now, so he had to use his head more. And what better way than befriending an enemy?

Damon smiled evilly. Yes, he could see it now: the evil demon killing the good friend of Damon Grey, Prince Wagon and good Damon fighting to defeat this great evil.

'I love this script... I should have joined the theater. Alas, born for the stage, forced to fight.'

Damon sat Waton down.

"I understand you, friend. In fact, it seems you were right, and I was less right. But that doesn't mean you can't turn it around."

Waton glanced at Damon's sudden change, his words almost bewitching. A soft aura of control leaked from Damon the influence of the Domination attribute and his high Charisma stat affecting the foolish prince.

Damon chuckled, his tone silk and poison.

"You're obviously better than Princess Abellona. You're an actual man, and she... she's just a woman."

Waton's eyes sparked. This was the first time in his life someone compared him to Abellona without making him feel inferior.

"It's true that you didn't win before, but that's because she was born with an unfair advantage. But that changes now. You are the chosen one."

Waton blinked. In that moment, it was as if only Damon's voice existed.

"I am... the chosen one...."

"Yes. Allow me to aid you. Let me bring out your full potential, and win the War Game... together."

Watson narrowed his eyes.

"You... you want to form a party?"

Damon smiled slyly.

"Of course. And I would like to nominate you as party leader."

"Party leader..." Watson muttered, finding Damon more tolerable than ever.

After that, what happened was a blur.

Damon noticed how flashy Watson was since he first met him, wearing a crown and flaunting his outfit. The boy wasn't very bright, and he was quite the egomaniac.

This world hated evil. Whenever evil rose, good would defeat it. But what people tolerated was a fool.

And if history was any example, it was the fact that evil people loved using fools.

This was the tale of the demon and the fool.

Chapter 666: Unknown's Unknown Plan

Everyone had a flaw. Perhaps being a demon was being able to deliver horrible outcomes from a place of seemingly good intent. Perhaps in Watson's eyes, Damon had good intentions.

But from Damon's perspective, Watson was the fool. At this point he was starting to wonder why he didn't think of this sooner.

He had high levels of deception and charisma in his mastery stats, so why was he letting this fool annoy him?

Having Waton on his side had some benefits, a lot actually. He was the ultimate meat shield, both in battle and politically. Damon had pissed off a lot of people after all, and honestly, having Waton on his side was good.

'I just didn't expect him to be such a paper tiger....'

One mention of his weakness and a few words, and Damon had already gained his begrudging trust.

'How did he survive so long in the imperial palace?'

Well, actually, the answer to that question was quite obvious. Waton was a fool, and a fool was no threat. Evil people loved fools because they could be used easily.

Waton was saved by his foolishness. No one really thought he stood a chance to earn the throne, so they just left him to his own devices.

'Hmmm, if I wasn't plotting to sleep with his sister I'd keep him alive so I can gain influence in court politics....'

Damon smiled faintly as his eyes flicked toward the orbs watching and broadcasting to the outside world.

'But first I have to screw over my grandfather just to make sure nothing suspicious is going on....'

Ahhh, being a scheming wretch was too many sweats.

Probably why Damon preferred the simple, more violent solutions. But alas, that didn't really help now that he was heavily injured.

He glanced at Waton with a soft smile curling at his lips.

"Your Highness... ohh, I mean party leader... what do you know about those demons? I'm sure someone as knowledgeable as you would have already gotten some information."

Waton cleared his throat. Someone as knowledgeable as him.... Hmm, he really liked the way this Damon Grey spoke.

"That's nothing to me, of course. My retinue thinks very highly of me. I received a file on them."

Damon smiled. As expected of the imperial family, they had already gathered information.

He glanced around, noticing the number of people had reduced.

Hmm. It seemed the magic was teleporting people at random.

Was this an attempt to make all preplanning and coordination meaningless?

Damon noticed the demons standing together on one side. He smiled at Waton.

"Which of them do you know?"

Waton began naming the demon youths and pointing at them, giving Damon a full overview of their powers and attributes. The more Damon learned, the more his expression darkened. Well, that wasn't good.

One of them was a necromancer, with a bone attribute.

Another was one of the children of the current demon lord, Adramelech. He was a master of sun magic.

There was also a descendant of Astaroth, the Lord of Decay, which meant that demon had inherited the terrifying attribute of decay.

Damon paused, then smirked. Wait, why was he worried? Wasn't this a good thing? So many people with broken powers meant if he devoured them, he would gain more power, more skills.

Wasn't this part of the reason he had unleashed his shadow clone, so he could devour them?

"Hey, Your Highness... isn't your attribute like the emperor's? You have the time attribute, don't you?"

Watson bit his lips. This was indeed his attribute, but it wasn't as great as people thought. Time was a very hard attribute to control or use. It was only truly powerful in his father's hands.

"I... I do. I am... it's the strongest attribute."

Damon almost scoffed. That was doubtful. Time attribute was not the strongest. The strongest would be the void attribute, which could use all physical laws like space, time, gravity, and whatever else. Or maybe not.... No, the world's strongest attribute was the domination attribute, which could dominate everything.

Dominates light, dominates space, dominates time. This was why Ashcroft was so terrifying.

Damon could feel the magic beneath him growing. He would soon be teleported, and it seemed Watson would be as well.

His eyes shifted to a girl among the demons. She was covered by a hood, its long cloak reaching the ground up to her feet. Damon could feel her gaze on him.

He caught sight of her chin and the small smile that curved up her lips when she saw him.

Damon felt a chill. It wasn't the chill that was strange or unfamiliar, but he was certain he had felt that gaze before. Just as soon as he felt it, it was gone.

His eyes narrowed.

"Hey, do you know that one?"

Watson narrowed his eyes, his expression confused.

"I'm afraid not. However, intel seems to suggest she's with Paimon."

Damon raised a brow.

"With Paimon?"

Watson nodded cautiously.

"She must be a witch from the Snake Temple. They are always weird and dangerous. What they can do is often undocumented, or poorly so. And then there are the rumors...."

Damon tilted his head slightly.

"Rumors? What rumors?"

Watson glanced at the magic orbs broadcasting everything. There were thousands, so not many eyes could focus on him and Damon with too many people to watch. Still, he leaned closer and whispered in Damon's ear.

"It's said that they can call or invoke the Unknown God of the demon races... sacrificing their lives for strange powers."

His eyes shifted, watching Damon carefully.

"Keep it to yourself. The temple doesn't like how their god answers when ours doesn't."

Damon nodded slowly.

'Hmmm. This is troublesome... or is it... no. Unknown, you're planning something again, aren't you? You planned this from the moment of my death in Lysithara. Everything has led me here....'

As soon as Damon reached that train of thought, the power of the battlefield grew more intense all around them. Everyone who had not disappeared began to fade away into sparks as space itself morphed and shifted.

Then suddenly, Damon heard a system chime.

[Quest]

[You have received a chain Quest]

[Do you wish to accept?]

[Y/N]

He chuckled as his body disappeared from the white realm.

"I knew it...."

Chapter 667: Act One

It was a pointless affair. Damon was certain of that. The system always had a tendency to give him an option.

But choice was an illusion. While the Unknown God seemed to despise fate and would strip it of its dignity every chance he got, that did not change the facts.

Falling into the plans of the Unknown God was also fate.

Even if it seemed like you had a choice, you would still be under the influence of a higher power that dictated or influenced the choices you made.

However, that was fine with Damon. At least for now.

At least in some way, he was choosing. It was his choice to say yes.

He could always choose no. Knowing those possibilities and options existed was more than enough for him.

Saying yes was a path to difficulty, but so was not making a choice. At least when he said yes, he was rewarded for his suffering.

Damon called that equivalent exchange. In a sense, it was a trade.

This was the reason he said yes.

The system chimed.

[Quest Act One]

[The Dominator's Burden]

Survive the 24 hours without losing your chosen pawn: [Prince Waton of Valtheron]

Do not kill any of the demon kin who wish to terminate him during these 24 hours.

Do not use shadows [Ruined Fairy & Ghost].

[Rewards]

[Primordial Shadow Essence: this wonderful essence has a unique ability to restore memories and personality traits of shadows.]

[Failure]

???????

Damon watched the first stage of his chain quest with a frown. Sensing the shadows stirring around him, he narrowed his eyes.

Ahh, this was diabolical.... no, it was just cruel.

Damon did not have his full power. The quest condition was to protect Waton, and not only that, he was forbidden from killing demon kin.

More importantly, the rewards were something he had to obtain. This was a way for him to restore Matia's personality, to bring her back in a sense to what she was before.

She would still be a shadow, but at least she would still be herself.

As for why this was diabolical.... well.

He was told the rewards beforehand, so he would not refuse.

Damon raised his head slightly to where he had been teleported. He wasn't alone here, which should have been a good thing since Waton was right next to him for some odd reason.

However, that brought Damon no joy. He was unsure of the prince's aptitude for combat.

His eyes lifted as he glanced at what was in front of him. It seemed Damon's luck had taken a turn for the worse.

He didn't know why, but his luck with forests was always horrible. Some of the most dreadful things he had experienced happened in forests under the cover of large trees.

The Beldam of the Whispering Forest, the evil forest Wendigo, being chased by trolls, surrounded by horrors, the death of Carmen Vale....

Hell, even Ashcroft himself had first been encountered in a forest.

"I really need to stay away from forests."

Damon's voice echoed with a soft sigh as he glanced around.

He was in a forest, its tall trees reaching high into the sky, their towering forms larger than any normal tree. That was saying something, after all the trees of the world of Aetherus already grew very tall.

Damon stood in a small clearing among the trees. But it was not the trees that drew his concern. It was what surrounded him.

'Ahhh, this is going to be a pain...'

His situation was not looking good.

He had just started, for goddess' sake, and this was what he was given.

Watson, who had been on the ground, stood up groggily, suffering from the side effects of the teleportation he had been through.

As soon as his vision cleared and the dizziness disappeared, his face went pale. He gulped, turning around, looking for somewhere to escape, but there was nothing just him and Damon standing in the open clearing.

His fists trembled as he saw the odds stacked against them. It didn't even occur to him to fight. The odds were simply unfair.

Surrounding them was a small group of youths armed to the teeth.

But these youths were different. The males bore horns on their heads and wings, while the females had wings alone.

In terms of looks, they carried a bewitching grace to their features.

Watson's face paled further.

"Demons," he muttered, recognizing them instantly.

This wasn't all of them, but the ones here were already annoyingly powerful.

Manata Astaroth, child of the Demon Lord of Decay or at least one of them.

He was a handsome young demon with brown hair, but his very presence carried an aura of rot and decay.

There was another Damon had to keep an eye on. A necromancer with the bone attribute. His ability to create, control, and summon the undead was terrifying. That one young man was a walking army. Dealing with him would be difficult.

He had twisted black horns, black hair, and heterochromia, one eye black, the other white as though symbolizing life and death, which he tempered at will.

According to what Waton had said before in the White Realm, his name was Kashi.

'Waton also said he had a lich....'

The others weren't anything to sneeze at either.

But Damon was forbidden from killing them. That was what made this even more difficult. Not to mention his own soul injuries, which hindered his fighting power. If he pushed himself too far, he would only worsen his own condition.

He glanced at Waton, who was visibly uneasy. Damon's Remorseless skill activated instinctively.

'If this fool dies, I lose my one chance to restore Matia....'

Damon glanced at his shadow, where she stood silently staring at him, wondering why he wasn't summoning her out to fight.

Which meant, more than his own survival, keeping Waton alive was the priority.

'I can always unleash my shadow clone if I need to....'

Manata Astaroth studied the two of them with a small smile, his brown hair swaying as he took a step forward.

"Well, well, well. Two little humans. Do you want to beg before you die, or will you struggle and then die?"

Damon's expression was impassive. He let out a small chuckle to himself, his seed of depravity trembling faintly in his heart.

'No... these fools can't stop me....'

He smiled at them, his voice arrogant and ringing through the clearing.

"I'm in a good mood. I'll let you demons walk away."

His words, full of dominance, were broadcast through the magic orbs for all to see.

Now this was a fight that would be viewed by many.

Chapter 668: A Little While Back

Let's go back in time, a bit earlier in the day before the main games began... no, even earlier, before the Demon Lord of Knowledge, Paimon, arrived.

Her hands trembled, her expression somewhat pale as she paced the room, sweat beading across her delicate face.

"Deep breath, deep breath... it's okay, it's not as bad as I think it is..." Luna muttered shakily.

She wasn't the only one in the room. In the far corner sat a pink-haired girl, her expression distant. Occasionally, a soft chuckle escaped her lips as she muttered to herself.

"I knew it... I knew it... I wouldn't live long enough to get my revenge. Of course my crazy teacher is going to piss off someone and get us all killed."

Her eyes flickered as she glanced at Luna, who still had the strength to pace around.

'How have her legs not given out yet?' Iris would have stood up if her own legs hadn't already gone numb from fear.

Luna's sweat touched the polished floor of the luxurious room.

"If I kneel and beg... I'm sure they'll show mercy to my brother. I know he'd rather die than beg... but... he'll do it for me. I can't let him die..."

She bit her lip hard. Naturally, their actions hadn't gone unnoticed, since they weren't truly alone in the room. In a small corner, a translucent figure watched them silently, unseen by their eyes.

Jarvis understood their reactions. It was sudden, out of nowhere. These two girls had been enjoying themselves in the capital, splurging money from a magic money card that clearly didn't belong to them.

Smiling as they strolled through the streets, they had said:

"How much did he say we should spend again?"

"Ohh, he didn't specify. That looks good, let's buy it."

"This too."

They had been buying anything and everything. Naturally, Damon had been the one footing the bill, but after all his looting, he was wealthy at the moment. Their spending hadn't even made a dent in his funds, and more importantly, he had his shadow Ghost watching them.

It was during this spending spree that they had been surrounded out of nowhere by knights of House Brightwater. Each of these knights was a powerhouse.

Jarvis had led the squad, disguised as a humble low-rank knight. After all, he was tasked with retrieving the Grand Duke's second and long-lost granddaughter. A single hair on her head went missing, and heads would roll.

However, no one had told poor Luna of the arrangements. Not her brother, not her grandfather. The knights had only shown up, grabbed her and Iris, and that was how they ended up in this luxurious room.

To no one's surprise, the two girls came to the most natural conclusion: Damon had pissed off the Grand Duke, had been captured, and now they were here to be punished alongside him.

Luna didn't care what happened to her, but she was ready to beg for her defiant brother. She knew his personality too well. His head would end up on a pike before he begged for his life.

While the girls stressed over nothing, Jarvis watched as a group of maids hurried inside, carrying armfuls of dresses. It was as if an entire clothing shop of branded gowns and accessories had been moved into the room.

They immediately got to work on the two girls.

Jarvis sighed at the chaos of women's preparations, watching as the maids scrubbed, cleaned, brushed, and dressed them. After what felt like forever, the two girls were finally ready.

Luna now wore a light blue dress that shimmered like the sky itself, a delicate tiara resting on her head, set with a white magic gem worth more than several generations of a small noble's net worth.

Iris wore a shorter gown that allowed easier movement. It was slightly loose, adorned with several ribbons, and scattered across its surface were gemstones that glittered faintly under the light.

Finally, they were ready to meet the Grand Duke. However, from where the girls stood, it felt more as if they had been dressed up for execution.

Luna had heard stories in Valtheron, that nobles despised the stench of poverty so much they forced commoners to dress in fine clothes before killing them.

Iris leaned closer, whispering nervously in her ear.

"What's gonna happen..."

Luna closed her eyes. Yes, this was the end. She already had magic circuit cancer. She wasn't going to live long anyway. She chuckled softly, hiding her fear.

"Those fools. They'll be killing someone who already has one foot in the grave anyway."

Iris paled, her eyes flickering with dread as she swallowed hard.

Luna's expression grew serious as they were led down the long hall. She whispered again to Iris.

"I'm afraid... we might have to endure some torture..."

Iris went white as a sheet.

Luna drew in a deep, resigned breath.

"But don't worry... my brother told me, if you're getting tortured, you just have to disconnect your mind from your body and go to lalala land. Works every time."

Iris nearly broke down on the spot. That sounded exactly like something Damon would say.

"Ahh... when did he tell you this..."

Luna bit her lip.

"Erhm... a few years ago, after he went missing for two weeks..."

Iris closed her eyes, resigning herself. Pain was a companion on the path of vengeance. She had been told that much already.

"I am ready..."

Jarvis pressed a palm to his forehead with a heavy sigh as he opened the grand doors to the pavilion. The loud cheers of the war games outside bled into the chamber as the two girls were brought forward.

The Grand Duke stood there with a stern expression, flanked by Duke Cassian and his daughter-in-law, Annalise.

The two men's eyes immediately locked onto Luna, their gazes sharp and unrelenting. Luna swallowed hard, glancing at Iris. Her heart resolved, she took a step forward, recalling every lesson in noble etiquette she knew.

She stopped before the Grand Duke and curtsied, bowing formally as a lady should.

"Greetings, Your Grace. I am Luna Grey. It is my utmost pleasure to stand before you eminence."

She didn't raise her head. Iris quickly imitated her posture, bowing as well.

The Grand Duke turned his eyes toward Cassian. His face barely contained a smile.

"Adorable..." he muttered under his breath.

Luna was sure she had misheard, until Cassian cleared his throat, resisting the urge to smile at her earnest demeanor.

"Do you know why you are here, young ladies?"

Before Luna could respond, Annalise suddenly pulled the girl into her bosom, her arms wrapping tightly around her.

"Ahhh, you're soooooooo cute... I'm going to keep you forever!"

Luna fell into despair.

'It's worse than I thought... human trafficking...'

Chapter 669: Strong ties

Luna was wearing the most forced smile ever. In fact, you could say the very fact that she had such an obviously forced smile made her look even cuter. It was unlike that wretch who could change his expression at the drop of a hat.

In fact, Cassian was sure in his mind the brat convinced himself he was actually telling the truth, that he would gaslight himself into reacting accordingly.

Not Luna, of course. She was just too pure. Though she was a smart girl and clearly she had seen her fair share of hardships.

It seemed Damon had protected her from the worst of it.

Cassian could not bring himself to imagine the hardships they had gone through.

The Grand Duke and Annalise were so eager to spoil her that it only made Luna feel even more uneasy.

"Your eyes are so bright, ahahaha, like the moon. I happen to have a nice castle with the ambiance of the moon... I'll just give it to you."

Cassian sighed. His father was going way overboard, his doting grandfather instincts taking over.

This was the seventh castle he had given her in the span of the conversation. She hadn't even done much talking. Of course, that wasn't including the mines he had given her, a whole vanguard of knights, three thousand magic beasts, and ownership of capital real estate.

Naturally, Luna didn't really think he had given her all these things. At most she thought it was just the Grand Duke being nice.

She did know she was somewhat adorable, or at least her brother had said so. This was probably why she got away with some things and also why people would want to sell her into prostitution.

But more than that, Luna was a people person. In fact, she was the opposite of Damon. She actually liked people.

If anything, her personality was almost optimistic and bubbly.

Though she wanted this to end quickly...

She had initially begged for her brother's life, but after seeing him talking with someone across the grounds she relaxed.

The grand duke reassured her afterwards.

The celebrations were reaching a fever pitch.

There was an announcement for the Vanguard to make a speech, and it was actually her brother in his armor.

He looked so... so amazing. That was her big brother.

Luna smiled, feeling excited. Then her face suddenly scrunched up when she came to the realization.

That was her brother. Her brother who was known to be, ernh... a troublemaker. The one who did as he pleased, the stubborn one.

She slowly turned to the Grand Duke.

"I... I apologize in advance, Your Grace. I promise my brother is a good person and respectable too. Please do not take any offense from his actions."

Annalise smiled sweetly at the young Luna.

"There's no need to apologize over and over again. There is nothing your brother can say or do up there that would surprise us."

Luna nodded as they reassured her. She bit her lips, trying to make herself invisible.

A few minutes later Annalise's lips twitched after hearing Damon's declaration. She closed her eyes to hide her worry.

Turning to Luna, she spoke softly.

"It's not a big deal. It's a small matter. Don't worry, sweetheart, nothing we can't handle."

The Grand Duke seemed over the moon.

"Jahhahaha, that's my boy!" The Grand Duke roared with laughter, slamming his feet against the ground.

Cassian wisely shut his mouth.

"Well, who wasn't wild in their youth," muttered Annalise, more to reassure herself than Luna.

Though she was mildly amused.

Luna didn't say anything, too worried to even notice the Grand Duke had referred to Damon as "my boy."

What came next was enough to give Luna a heart attack. Her brother was more reckless than he had ever been before. In fact, it was like he was trying to die and leave her all alone.

The thought of her brother dying was terrifying.

She had no idea when she started crying. However, she was soon comforted by Annalise, who gently held her.

Eventually, the Duke's daughter and Damon's friend Evangeline joined in, helping to calm her down.

"Don't worry, Luna... he'll be just fine. Trust me, he's not going anywhere."

Evangeline proceeded to introduce herself to Luna. Even though Luna was already aware of who she was, Damon had a bad habit of complaining about Evangeline.

Luna wiped her tears and sniffled.

"You... you're the big breasted cow who's been bullying my brother..."

Evangeline paused, staring at her, then slowly looked down at her own chest. Luna's tear-streaked face was suddenly filled with anger.

She took a deep, shaking breath.

"My brother told me how you ambushed him at the academy gate and hit him. Why did you hit my brother?"

The Grand Duke glanced at the two of them, a small smile on his face.

Evangeline remembered. That was after Damon had hurt her best friend, so she had been reasonably angry.

"Big breasted cow... did that bastard tell you to call me that? And I only hit him when he does something that warrants a beating."

Luna sniffed, her face still angry.

"He did! He told me all the horrible things you've done to make his life difficult. Including cleaning your rooms, carrying your bags... and washing your unmentionables!"

Evangeline paled. "Wha... what..."

Her mother and father didn't want to get involved, so they all looked away awkwardly.

She bit her lips. "That son of a bitch... no wonder he was so cooperative today. He set me up."

Looking at Luna, who was indignant, Evangeline knew there was only one thing that would cancel it out.

She pointed outside.

"Is Damon Grey the type of person to listen to anyone? Think about it."

Luna gasped, realization dawning on her.

"He... that... ahhh... my brother used me for a bad joke. He's still holding a grudge from that time I called him a pervert."

They bonded over their shared frustrations with Damon.

The Grand Duke smiled warmly.

This was like a dream for the old man.

It wasn't long after that a massive figure appeared in the sky, and Paimon descended.

When the Demon Lord appeared and spoke of her veiled intents, Luna's eyes shifted from soft and kind to a deep coldness that made Annalise see a hint of her husband in the girl.

No doubt about it. She was their blood.

And like snow in the sun, time passed, and the war games began.

The first series of battles put Damon smack in the middle of demons.

The broadcast showed his figure standing with an easy expression.

Chapter 670: Set The Bar High

Hearing Damon's arrogant words was not at all reassuring for Luna or Iris, who were watching the broadcast.

Iris had been quiet the whole time, acting as if she wasn't there, but seeing Damon surrounded made the girl uneasy. Her fingers gripped the hem of her clothes tightly as her lips trembled.

"Don't... don't die...."

This was her fear as well. Damon was the closest thing she had to family in this world. He was the one who forced himself into her life when her father was gone. In her darkest hour, he had made her believe she could still pay back those who had ruined her. That was why seeing him surrounded by demons made her face pale.

Luna, on the other hand, clenched her fist, her eyes cold as ice. She spoke the first thing that came to her heart, her voice low but filled with killing intent.

"Kill them all, Damon... kill them."

The crowd didn't seem to be in favor of Damon even surviving, much less winning. Murmurs and whispers spread among the onlookers like wildfire.

"It's looking bad for the kid... the games just began and he's already running into those monsters."

A woman with a scar running down her cheek narrowed her eyes as she spoke, her tone grim.

"Those are demon heirs, a rank above him to boot. He's dead...."

It was a shame really. He was a young talent favored by the Grand Duke.

"I even heard the reason the Grand Duke left Lumos after all these years is because he saw the boy had talent."

"Potential is wasted if you're dead."

Everyone said their piece, and no one really thought Damon would win.

"Too bad the prince will die with him. Damn demons... this was a ploy to kill our geniuses before they could grow."

"Five on two. Those demons have no honor."

Seras chuckled as she looked at the broadcast showing Damon. She tore into a piece of jerky she had hurriedly bought, wanting to taste Damon's flesh as he died. Her lips curled in cruel delight.

"Show me what you got, boy...."

Paimon wore a small smile as she glanced at the emperor.

"A shame, your majesty. It seems your son will be among the first casualties. And sadly, after getting killed by demons, his soul will belong... to the Unknown God."

The emperor Kronos kept his expression calm, but deep inside he was aware his son would die today. That boy never really accomplished anything in life, but he was still his son. He still wished he would live.

Damon stood back to back with Waton as a full party of demon heirs surrounded them.

"Hey, Wagon... can you hold your own against one of them?"

Waton bit his lips, already used to being called Wagon by Damon. He gulped, but the world and his father were watching.

He had to show the dignity of a prince. Yet his eyes watered, trembling with fear, no matter how hard he tried to hide it.

More than anything, he wanted to ask those who had fought in real battles—how did they learn bravery, or where did they buy it?

"I... I can take anyone...." He could not.

"This is nothing." It was everything.

"I can kill them in a second...." He would die in a second.

"Don't worry about me. Save yourself...." Worry about me.

Damon sighed. This guy's pride would get them killed. His eyes never left the demons, but he understood Waton and his pride. Spineless as he seemed, he still had the dignity of a prince. He was not as pathetic as Damon had thought.

'I can't use mana or my soul backlash would get worse... or rather, I have to use it and any abilities in moderation.'

'Fine. I have a plan. It's crazy, but I can pull it off.'

"No need, Wagon. You seem to be a support class, right? Fine. I'll act as the sword. Support me with your magic."

Waton bit his lips as a staff materialized in his hands. His knuckles turned pale as he held onto it tightly.

"My magic is hard to adapt to. I may end up confusing you, I th—"

"Don't worry, I'll be fine. Fight at your own rhythm, and leave the rest to me. I promise... you will not die today. Maybe tomorrow, but not today."

"And who are you to decide that?" the demon heir of Rot asked, his eyes burning with malice.

Damon ignored him, reaching into his shadow storage.

The demons were cruel. They weren't attacking because they wanted to mentally break their prey, to build upon their despair, to let them realize the hopelessness of their situation and eventually crumble without a fight.

"Which of you clowns is the strongest again?"

The brown-haired demon, the child of the Lord of Rot, stepped forward with a cold smile.

"That would be me. Manata Astaroth. Of our current group, I am the most powerful."

Damon chuckled, a disdainful expression twisting his face.

"So there's someone stronger than you... You're weak."

Manata didn't waste time. With a loud boom, he crossed the distance between them.

Damon didn't shy away from a direct physical clash. He didn't reinforce his body with magic, but he was still a monster with insane physical stats.

[5x]

He poured the fivefold boost into his physical strength.

[Strength: 80,620] [5x]

Manata almost laughed, seeing a human challenge a demon in a physical clash. He could already see Damon's bones breaking within the first strike, even before his magic attribute shredded the foolish human's body.

Kashi and the other demons wouldn't even need to jump in before Damon died.

With the sound of thunder clapping, the wind roared through the trees, earth shattering as their fists collided.

Then a figure was sent flying through the forest, shattering branches and bringing the tall trees crashing down with groaning sounds.

Cough, cough... Damon coughed slightly, still standing in place with his fist outstretched, a few scratches on his gauntlet.

He hadn't used magic, but his body was still not in good condition. However, the one who was sent flying... was the demon.

Damon had set the bar a little too high. Why did he expect this demon to be that strong? Why did he think he was as strong as Ashcroft?

Ashcroft was an anomaly.

"Ahhh, you disappoint me. They just don't make demons like they used to...."

The others were frozen in shock. Even Waton stood wide-eyed at the sight before him. A human had just sent a demon flying in a feat of pure strength—a demon a whole rank higher.

The confusion wasn't only with them. Outside, everyone watching was shocked.

Manata stood up with a cold smile, his voice trembling with rage.

"Kill them... kill them now!"