

Shadow 721

Chapter 721: I Want One

The smoke rising from the distance didn't seem to bother Damon too much. He walked calmly around the edge of the water toward one of the ruined bridges.

He had been anxious, concerned about Sylvia. He could have waited at the bridge, but it was pointless. Sylvia would not come that way. The young elf girl seemed to be following the same route as Lilith Astranova.

That was why Damon was here. According to his estimation, Lilith had passed through and gone to the main island.

"What's up with her... at least drop by and say hi."

He didn't understand why Lilith hadn't even bothered to meet him, just gone about her own thing. But this was Lilith—he didn't need to worry about her.

"Even without me, she'd be fine."

That thought made Damon smile sadly, though there was a soft glimmer of melancholy in his eyes. He wondered how a world without him would look. How long until he was forgotten?

It was the sad thing about death, no matter who you were, when people died there was only a short period of mourning. After that, life just went on. Time didn't stop because you died.

The world didn't really care, and your loved ones eventually moved on. Maybe that thought brought him some comfort.

Damon wasn't alone. Wendy and Waton followed him, watching while Wendy eagerly asked Waton questions. Then she stopped and nudged Damon with her elbow.

"Why so sad?"

Damon smiled, shaking his head with a small chuckle.

"Do I look sad?"

She didn't quite understand him, but before she could say anything, a faint presence appeared in her senses.

A young woman with long white hair trudged forward, her armor gleaming faintly like the moon. A few elves followed behind her, each several steps back. She wore a calm and almost deadpan expression, until she lifted her head and spotted Damon's dark hair.

A small smile bloomed across her beautiful face, almost like the radiant moon shining down its gentle light upon a dark world.

Without a moment of hesitation, Sylvia ran toward him. Damon let out a sigh of relief as she closed the distance and leapt into his arms, not caring that the world was watching through the broadcast orbs. She was a princess, after all, one who should maintain her decorum, but that didn't stop her.

Damon caught her in his arms, spinning her slightly before setting her down on her feet.

He half-expected the elves behind her to complain, or at least say something, but to his surprise, they were quiet.

No, that had to be reiterated, they were quiet. That was like saying the sun had fallen from the sky. These were elven royal guards, racist supremacists who hated him.

Why would they stay silent while their frail, reserved princess hugged a vagabond commoner with nothing to his name?

That was excluding his greatest sin, not being an elf, but a lowly human.

"That's weird," Damon muttered softly.

"What's weird?" Sylvia asked with a soft smile.

He shook his head slowly. "Eh, it's nothing. I was looking for you. You were a lot harder to find than I thought."

Sylvia brushed her hair aside. "You were looking for me?"

Damon took a deep breath and nodded silently.

Sylvia glanced to the side, noticing an unfamiliar face.

"Who is that?" she asked coldly.

Damon didn't even look. "Oh, that's Waton. He's the prince of Valtheron. Didn't you already know that?"

She gave him a deadpan look.

"I know who he is. I'm talking about the woman next to him."

Damon sensed trouble in the air. Sylvia was sweet, she wouldn't usually be hostile, nevertheless he could sense faint traces of killing intent radiating from her.

Wendy, of course, picked up on it instantly. Her eyes narrowed.

Damon gestured to her. "That's Wendy."

Wendy stepped forward, not backing away from Sylvia. The elves behind Sylvia began sweating profusely at the sight of the princess's slight irritation.

Wendy looked Sylvia directly in the eyes.

"I'm Wendy— and he and I are going to have babies together soon."

Hearing those words, Sylvia's hands trembled. Her elf ears twitched slightly, her eyes lowered, and a cold, icy light flickered in them. She turned to Damon with a trembling smile.

"She's crazy, right? That's not true... right?"

Her voice was conflicted, as if she'd just been betrayed.

Damon scratched the back of his head awkwardly. "Well... it's a long and complicated story..."

Sylvia's eye twitched. Turning back to Wendy, she smiled, softly, mockingly.

"Oh, is that so? Soon? Why not now?"

She placed her hand gently on her abdomen, her tone sweet but venomous.

"Like I am right now. You wouldn't understand the joy of carrying a child, would you?"

Damon felt his legs go weak.

"This stupid woman..." he muttered.

He glanced up at the floating magic orbs and waved his hand nervously.

"It's not like that at all! This is a serious misunderstanding!"

Sylvia didn't even look at him, mocking Wendy with a sneer.

"I'm pregnant."

Damon immediately shook his head.

"No, she's not."

Sylvia pointed straight at him, her voice sharp.

"He's the father!"

Damon raised his hands defensively.

"No, I'm not!"

Wendy glared at him, then at Sylvia.

"I want one."

"No, you don't! And she's not pregnant!" Damon resisted the impending doom.

He walked to Sylvia, making sure the orbs caught his serious expression, and grabbed her arms.

"Sylvia, you're not pregnant. You aren't having a baby."

"Tsk." She clicked her tongue, looking away.

Damon shook her lightly, trying to bring her to her senses.

He cleared his throat, addressing the world watching through the orbs.

"She's not pregnant. Hell, she's a virgin! This was all a prank to make things difficult for the elf king, for sending those lousy, talentless bums to try to assassinate me!"

He pointed at the orbs.

"Everyone knows I like older women. I mean, if it was the elf queen, that'd be a different story, I'm innocent!"

Even while clearing his name, he couldn't resist rage-baiting Kadelas.

Sylvia stopped, glaring at him. She walked up close and looked him dead in the eyes, shaking her head.

"You don't like older elf women. In fact, it's proven elf women older than three hundred have a musty scent. You want nothing to do with old women."

She threw her own mother under the carriage.

Chapter 722: Soft Promise

After a few minutes of making a statement in front of the magical orbs like a nobleman who had just been caught red-handed embezzling funds from the imperial cabinet, Damon was finally convinced the world believed his innocence.

Or so he hoped.

Across kingdoms, the broadcast orbs flickered out one by one, leaving behind a storm of laughter, gossip, and chaos.

In arena, the crowd was still roaring.

"He said she's a virgin! The man actually declared it before the goddess!" one soldier wheezed, pounding the table until mugs fell.

Luna didn't even know how to react. Her brother had been busy.

Even among human nobles, the reactions were split. Some were shocked, others entertained.

The duke sighed with a resigned expression.

"If nothing else, that boy knows how to stay relevant."

He glanced at his father.

"We're the ones cleaning up after him, right?"

The grand duke nodded slowly.

Cassian sighed.

"I figured you'd say that."

Back at the scene, Wendy shot Damon a dubious look but didn't say anything further.

Matia was still in his shadow at this point, she was used to the drama that was his life.

Watson trudged to Damon as if he didn't want anyone to notice him, whispering in Damon's ear.

"Ergh... the last noble I knew with your achievements died tragically when he got cut up in a fight between two particularly fierce women..."

Damon's brows twitched.

"I'm single dammit. We're just friends."

Watson smiled with a knowing expression.

"Of course, of course, I believe you." That was the face of an unbeliever.

Damon looked at Sylvia, who was now sitting on a rock with a small smile on her face. It was almost like she enjoyed getting him in trouble.

"I just lost my one leverage with the old elf... good job, Sylvia."

She smiled, twirling her hair.

"You're welcome."

"That was sarcasm," he added with a deadpan expression.

"Oh, sorry. We don't have that in Iorvas."

Damon's eyes twitched with a pang of irritation.

'This brat is really paying me back for all the times I took advantage of her.'

Shaking his head, he walked right next to her and sat down.

"Congratulations on reaching the third class, Sylvia... in record time too."

She smiled softly hearing his words.

"Right back at you. Though I am a little envious. I had to rely on some rather peculiar means... to achieve it, unlike you."

He raised an eyebrow, seeing her elven royal guards trembling slightly with fear, their legs jittering.

"What do you mean?" he asked worriedly.

She smiled, pulling out several red potions in a vial.

"I made potions, see? Just enough for everyone. But it seems you guys won't be needing them."

Damon felt a little relieved. He thought she had done something extreme, though he had a feeling he wasn't far from the truth. But did he want to find that out or not?

"As long as you're not hurt, that's fine with me."

In the end, he didn't really care; if she was alright, that was enough for him. If he asked, she would tell him, but since she didn't of her own accord, Damon had no reason to pry.

He couldn't treat Sylvia like a helpless princess forever.

He glanced at the floating book in front of her with the symbol of the unknown god etched into it. Sylvia he trusted to make her own decisions. The unknown god, however, was a different story.

"Just be careful, okay? You know you can tell me anything."

He whispered it softly, assuring her. Sylvia wanted to escape her controlling parents, Damon was not about to replace them by meddling too much in her affairs.

"I know. I haven't forgotten your promise to me... you are still going to keep it, right?"

She whispered softly, recalling the day he saved her from the spirit possession of the dark spirit Rashi Ignath.

"I... as long as I live." There was hesitation in his voice.

Even promises ended with death.

Still, to avoid the somber mood, he forced a smile on his face.

"Anyway... why are you following, or better yet, tracking Lilith?"

Sylvia paused, biting her lips, her grey eyes narrowing.

"I... what if I want... to kill her."

She spoke those words as if walking on eggshells.

Damon narrowed his eyes, turning to glare at her coldly.

"We both know that was a joke of poor taste."

Sylvia lowered her head slightly.

"Hmmm, that's why I won't kill her. I don't hate her per se, but I can't be bothered to like her either... it's a matter of my pride as a woman."

Damon didn't know what happened between the two of them, but Lilith also seemed to have the same feelings for Sylvia.

It was mutual.

'Why can't we all get along.'

Interesting coming from him of all people.

Sylvia glanced up, then back at him.

"When she and I meet, don't interfere, okay? It would be really bad if you do. I'd really hate to hurt you."

Damon was even more confused now. Hurt him? Did she realize he was more powerful than she was?

He thought that until he glanced at the floating book in front of her. On second thought, was he more powerful than her? That book was a black box that allowed Sylvia to do anything, as long as she paid the price for the knowledge it gave her.

"Don't mind me. You guys have your cat fight. I'm just a passerby."

Nodding her head, she smiled.

"That's good. I was a little worried you'd side with Lilith Astranova."

"Sure. What are friends for," he muttered absentmindedly.

In the distance, the combat zone was shrinking, consuming the last parts of the arena save for the main island behind them.

"Let's go." Damon reached out, giving Sylvia his hand.

She raised her hand but hesitated for a moment. In her heart, she wanted to take Damon's hand, but if she did, she'd always be a damsel in distress who needed him to save her.

It was alright if he came running, she loved being his damsel but Sylvia knew that wasn't enough to compete with the likes of Lilith Astranova.

She shook her head. As much as it stung to say it, she whispered.

"No."

Damon was slightly taken aback by her refusal. Never did he imagine Sylvia would reject him. The last time she had done that, she was possessed by a dark spirit and it was because he had hurt her.

She raised her face to his.

"It's not that I don't want to... I just have some unfinished business."

She smiled at him.

"I'll catch up... even if I'm a little slow. So... will you wait for me?"

Her words had a double meaning, but Damon wasn't dense.

He forced a smile.

"Sure... I'll see you before it all ends."

She raised her pinky finger.

"Is that a promise?"

They locked fingers.

"I promise."

Chapter 723: Meadow

"My lord, the goddess races have made it to the meadow."

The voice of the priestess from the snake temple echoed out behind him.

Damon remained fixed in place, his head throbbing from the prolonged use of Faceless.

It was less pronounced than he thought, but he was gradually losing a sense of his identity.

'I was wrong to assume Faceless didn't affect me because it was a shadow clone.'

Damon was running out of time, still he held it together, he didn't forget to remind himself.

'I am Damon Grey, son of Noctis and Ranar Grey.'

His will was strong enough to avoid losing himself, for now.

He nodded at the young demon kin woman acting as his adjunct.

His gaze was still fixed on the dungeon gate, but he didn't miss the large amounts of people gathering in the distance.

They were earlier than he had ordered. It wasn't midnight. In fact, midnight was a few hours away from now.

"My lord, what are your orders."

Damon didn't say anything for a while, just stared blankly.

"Kill them all."

As soon as he said those words, he dissolved into the shadows, appearing in front of an army of demon beasts. The demon kin stood in front of the ranks acting as commanders.

They were exactly seventy-two demons present.

It was a terrifying army, even if it was small. Monstrous demon beasts that could rip apart a person, strange horned monsters with whip-like tails. Flying demon beasts in the air with claws that sparked with flames.

It was quite a sight.

From the hilltops surrounding the meadow, soldiers and scouts from the coalition trembled as they looked upon the black tide gathering below. Some swallowed hard, gripping their weapons until their knuckles turned white.

"Monsters... they brought real monsters..." one of them whispered.

Another muttered a prayer to the goddess of light, his voice shaking. "Please... grant us courage."

Bakemon Baal bowed, prompting the other demon kin to do the same.

Damon waved his hand, looking at the army on the other side. Their numbers had waned. They looked bloodied and tired.

Even so, their killing intent and fighting spirit were high.

Abellona stood in front of the coalition army, looking at Damon with her deep crimson eyes.

'So that's what it feels like to be her enemy.'

He could already hear her raising morale and giving some impassioned speech about glory and victory, promising them the title of heroes on the battlefield and all what not.

Even from afar, some soldiers wept as she spoke. Her words carried hope where none should exist. The sound of her voice reached across the meadow like a heartbeat.

"For the goddess," someone whispered in awe.

Damon felt detached from it all. He was standing here on this battlefield, but he felt like he was watching it all from the eyes of an uninterested observer, as if it had nothing to do with him.

With her speech completed, she raised her spear into the sky and roared the battle charge.

The sounds of their battle cries reached into the heavens, deafening in its might like thunder clapping in a stormy sky. He felt the ground thunder beneath his feet, sand shaking with the rocks.

Even the demons behind him stirred, their growls rising to match the cries of their enemies. Some beat their chests, others clawed at the ground, unable to contain their bloodlust.

The demon army did not move. They dared not attack without Damon's order, and he raised his hand.

"Forward."

That was all he said.

The army of demons roared past him, unleashed upon their enemies.

Glowing flashes of destruction filled the sky before the two armies even met. The earth trembled and shook, explosions rocking the ground.

Time seemed to slow down as the two armies met, then in a deafening clash of steel and flesh.

And the symphony of chaos followed. In this madness it was hard to tell friend from foe.

This was what battle was actually like all you needed to do was kill and don't get killed.

The claws of a large demon beast pinned through the armor of a young woman, lifting her into the air and slamming her through the bodies of a few people as they scattered, thrown into the air.

Flames fell from the sky along with the bleeding corpses of both the flying demons and those who had wings to meet them.

Blood rained from the sky in this clash, and flames and ash rose into the night sky.

In all this combat, Damon merely walked through the battlefield. For some odd reason, despite the battle and screams around him, no one attacked him. Almost as if he didn't exist.

No one, not even those consumed by the greed of his bounty.

Among the coalition lines, confusion spread like wildfire. Soldiers pointed at the figure moving calmly through the bloodshed.

Even the commanders hesitated. The orbs recording the battle flickered.

It was an odd sight to stand unopposed on a battlefield.

The clouds in the sky began to gather, and he watched the blood pool and fill the ground.

Each death was more gruesome than the last, yet here he was, almost like an observer.

He narrowed his eyes.

"Something is wrong."

He just couldn't be sure what it was.

Then he paused right, he was forgetting something.

'Where is the priestess from the snake temple.'

He didn't know her name, but she wasn't on the battlefield. Spreading his shadow perception, he sensed the other demons, but not her.

Each of them had found an opponent to engage in battle with, the sole exception of her.

His shadow perception spread to the edge of the battlefield. There she was, standing with her hands up in the sky as if invoking a prayer.

"What is she doing."

There was a glitter, a white sparkle like stars. Slowly, she dropped her hands to the ground.

Damon frowned. Then he heard a low hum from the ground as the priestess began to convulse.

Tears of blood poured from her eyes as she muttered and chanted something under her breath.

However, Damon managed to make out her first words.

"Hail Unknown, the Unknown God."

His skin prickled as his danger sense exploded. He took a slight step to the side, avoiding a spear aimed for his head.

This was the source of his danger sense reacting.

He tilted his head slightly to find Abellona glaring at him, her spear in hand a few steps from him.

"Amon," she called out coldly.

Damon turned to face her, his shadow perception still on the priestess who continued to mutter as she bled.

'I should get my main body here quickly... but first... to heal my wounds.'

Abellona wasn't the only one here to face him. Leona had come as well, holding her greatsword slick with blood.

Velora Nyxfall from the Silver Glades, and a few others.

Who he really didn't care about. It was a party of seven assembled to kill him.

"Suppose you would do."

"Shall we begin."

Chapter 724: I Was Born In The Dark

Amon was said to be an invincible, faceless immortal ruler who could not be killed even by the Grand Duke of the Valtheron Empire.

He was right in front of them. This was the enemy they had to overcome.

If they managed to kill him, the demons would be demoralized.

That was why Abellona created a subjugation party for the sole purpose of killing him.

As for the other powerful demons, the worst of them were to be dealt with by Renata Malcrist. She would be fighting Bakemon, son of the demon lord Baal.

Evangeline had some hostile grudge against Adramelech, which was reasonable. House Brightwater were enemies of the demons who bore the Adramelech name.

Xander Ravenscroft and Emilia Highgon would be taking on some of the demon kin in Amon's Seventy-Two.

Xander Ravenscroft had initially insisted on fighting Amon, but after his conversation with Damon Grey, he seemed willing to hold his hostility for a little while.

Or maybe it was a strategy to wait until Amon was weaker.

Amon was just standing there, yet even without a trace of his aura, there was this invisible pressure they felt. They could not tell his expression, Amon was faceless.

Across the battlefield, even the demons held their breath. In the distance, ethereal projection orbs hovered above the coalition's forward lines, transmitting the fight across the world. Soldiers, nobles, and citizens watched with frozen awe. The name Amon carried mysterious terror, and now that legend stood silent, calm, and alive before their eyes.

Leona Valefier gripped her sword, lightning crackling all around her. Sparks lit the air like a brewing storm.

"You hurt my friend and killed his brother... you'll pay..."

No one had been willing to charge at Amon first, but Leona didn't hesitate. She was angry, truly angry. This Amon person was the reason Xander was so depressed. He was causing him pain, and that alone was more than enough reason for her to hate him.

She didn't even care that he was a demon.

Leona vanished with a flicker as she swung her sword forward, appearing in front of Amon with a swift, sharp swing.

This flash would have caught someone unfamiliar with her Ascendant Armor and technique of guard, but this was Damon. He knew how she fought. He knew her opening strike.

With a single step, he avoided her attack, and before Leona could react, he slammed his elbow into her, using her own momentum to toss her to the side.

Leona exploded with lightning the moment he touched her, the jolt traveling through his body and slightly numbing him.

Damon stayed calm, even as a crimson wave of destruction came from Abellona, covering for Leona.

He reached to the side and pulled out a spear from a corpse, swatting her attack aside and taking a step back.

Fighting Leona hand to hand, or with any conductor, was annoying. She was a walking bolt of lightning, or better yet, a storm. Wearing her armor, she was always protected by her own destructive attribute.

Damon had only sparred with her a handful of times, but only now did he realize how much different she was when she was trying to kill.

'Suppose I shouldn't hold back. I should flex my muscles a bit...'

The ground around him spread with shadows, devouring the remains of the dead.

He heard the faint chime of the system feeding him attribute points and shadow energy.

'I really do love battlefields. The more people die, the stronger I become...'

He raised his hand and whispered in a cold voice,

"Frost Dominate."

The temperature all around him began to drop. With his massive amount of mana, he unleashed a cold blizzard that spread across the field.

It was inferior to what Matia could do with her skill, but Damon didn't mind. His goal wasn't destruction, it was demonstration. He was showing off his power.

Now, the real battle began.

He created a sword made of ice, then took a step forward and vanished into the chaos of the battlefield.

Abellona snapped her head to the side.

"Watch out!" Her words came too late for the mage of the party.

The young woman, a third-year student from the Eldorian Magic Academy, turned around just in time to see the faceless Amon holding his sword high.

She slowly lowered her head, feeling her legs go weak as she fell to her knees, collapsing in a pool of her own blood.

Her corpse disappeared as soon as it hit the ground.

[You have slain Lisa of Sirini]

'One down...'

He raised his hand, waving it as ice turned to frost, and frost became mist. Leona managed to close the distance, but as she reached for his face with her sword, he didn't even move. Her blade passed through him.

It was an enchantment of his Ascendant Armor. She would have known that, if not for his Faceless skill, which interfered with how others perceived his abilities.

That opening was all he needed. He discarded the sword and blasted Leona with a wave of ice.

However, she reached out and grabbed his hand with a smile.

"Got you."

Damon hadn't expected that. He underestimated her, but no matter.

Leona's fist came rushing toward his face with all her might while she held his other hand.

He simply reached out and stopped her strike with a massive boom. The ground cracked beneath them, a crater forming at their feet. He slammed his head into her forehead, tossing her aside, just as something leaped from the shadows.

The dark elf — Velora Nyxfall — emerged, his body cloaked by shadows.

Damon dodged the dagger and crouched low, evading the follow-up. With a flash step, he appeared next to a young adventurer holding a shield and teleported behind him at the last second.

He grabbed the man's head from behind and snapped his neck.

[You have slain Ginna of Trontel]

The corpse was consumed, feeding Damon's soul fresh nutrients.

He evaded a series of attacks from Abellona, his fast movement and teleportation keeping him one step ahead.

Arrows flew from the shadows, Velora again the elf firing with precision, hidden amongst the shadows of corpses.

Damon frowned, irritated by the shadow attribute user. Subconsciously, he willed the shadows to reject him and suddenly, Velora was expelled, tossed out into the open.

Even Damon blinked in surprise, but quickly reined in his confusion.

'Superior Umbral attribute... so that's it.'

Damon's attribute was a superior version of the shadow attribute.

Velora rolled and ducked back into the shadow of a massive corpse.

Damon scoffed, blocking Abellona's next strike and ordering a horde of demon beasts to engage her.

"You think darkness is your ally? You merely adopted the dark. I was born in it, molded by it."

He took a step, appearing directly in front of Velora Nyxfall.

"I am known to the shadows... and you're looking unfamiliar."

He kicked the elf into the air, sending him flying. Leona darted forward and caught him before the maw of a massive demon beast could close on him.

All around, soldiers and demons alike froze, watching as Damon — no, Amon — stood at the heart of the chaos, laughing maniacally.

The battlefield trembled. Even those watching from the outside through the magic orbs went silent.

"You are outmatched," Damon said, his cold voice carrying through the chaos.

The world seemed to hold its breath.

Chapter 725: Doesn't Ring A Bell

Xander gritted his teeth, evading an attack from the demon in front of him.

The blow carved a deep furrow in the ground where he had stood a second ago, dust and black energy rising in choking clouds. His lungs burned, his armor hummed with strain, but his eyes never once left Amon in the distance.

The dark figure clashing with Leona and Abellona amidst the storm of blood and steel.

Most of the party was already dead. The battlefield was littered with broken armor, spent mana stones, magic scrolls, broken artifacts and corpses of both demon and man alike.

Only a handful remained fighting Amon.

The wounded dark elf Velora, Abellona fighting desperately, and Leona holding the line with sparks of lightning dancing around her exhausted frame.

Blood trickling down her forehead, though she was relatively fine, as if Amon didn't bother to focus on her.

"Where the hell is Damon."

Xander threw his spear forward, the weapon whistling through the smoky air before he slammed his fist into the ground.

The earth groaned in response, and a field of gravity rippled outward, bending stones and soil as it rose around him. The weight of the world pressed down, shaking the debris-laden field.

He gritted his teeth harder. He didn't have a third-class skill, even though he had managed to reach the third-class advancement. His mind burned with the bitter truth.

Guess we know who a god favors... and gods do have favorites. Xander just wasn't one of them.

The demon he faced waved his hand, and the ground around him decayed, withering like rotting flesh. Cracks spread in a circular pattern beneath his feet, black mist seeping through them as the stench of death filled the air.

Xander didn't seem particularly focused on his opponent. His gaze still flicked toward Amon, and that earned a snarl.

"Eyes over here, human... you dare look down on Manata Astaroth."

Xander's expression remained unchanged. He closed his eyes for a brief moment, exhaling through his nose before opening them again with a cold glare.

"Hmmm. I've been wasting my time on you... but this is getting me nowhere."

His armor expanded, metallic plates shifting and locking into place as it took its Sovereign Mantle form. Energy lines glowed across its edges like veins of molten silver.

"I apologize for leaving you alive for so long. Allow me to correct that."

His spear gripped tightly in both hands, he charged forward at the demonkin.

Manata was undeterred. His attribute was decay, and as long as he touched something, he could break it down until it was nothing but dust. The ground beneath him dissolved as he moved, his presence spreading corruption.

Xander's spear came barreling down at him, its sharp tip gleaming in the chaos of the battlefield, illuminated by the countless chaotic blasts of magic that painted the sky.

Manata didn't back down. He met Xander's attack head-on, his body sliding past the spear's tip with demonic agility, trying to close the distance. But Xander was already a step ahead.

He triggered the first enchantment of his Ascendant Armor.

[Weightbreaker] amplifies spear strikes with gravitational force, turning every swing into a shockwave.

Manata didn't expect the shaft of the spear itself to carry power. The impact released a concussive blast that rippled outward, crushing the air and sending Manata's body flying backward. Even though he had shifted his stance at the last moment, it was too late.

He crashed into a mound of broken earth, snarling, then retaliated instantly. A burst of decay energy surged toward Xander. The demon expected him to dodge.

But Xander didn't even move. The large armor that covered him took the full brunt of the magic like an immovable wall.

Manata frowned as his attribute corroded the armor's surface, cracks spreading across the metal like spiderwebs.

Xander sneered, grabbed him by the arms, and activated his armor's second enchantment.

[Black Orbit] creates a gravitational field that pulls enemies into a set radius.

His intent was clear. To crush Manata until nothing remained.

The pressure mounted. The air trembled as Manata's bones creaked audibly, his form twisting under the weight. The ground split beneath their feet.

"Arrghhh!" Manata roared in pain, forcing his arms wide and slamming his head forward.

His horns collided with Xander's helm, the impact ringing out like metal struck by a hammer. Xander staggered a step, and that single motion gave Manata the opening he needed.

The demon slipped free, his own head bleeding from the strike.

Manata's fury exploded. He punched Xander with a savage uppercut and kicked off his chest, using the momentum to circle behind him. His movements blurred.

The demon's hands wrapped around Xander's torso from behind just as the human unleashed another wave of crushing gravity in defense.

Manata reacted instantly, spreading his wings to escape the field. He shot upward, but not fast enough.

Xander increased his own weight, and though Manata's decay pressed at his body, he smiled. The higher they soared, the heavier the tension between them grew.

"I was hoping you would do that," Xander spoke coldly, his voice steady and filled with grim satisfaction. Manata's eyes widened.

Xander reached behind him, seized one of the demon's horns, and spun his entire body in the air.

The sound was sickening. His gauntlet clamped down, and with one violent twist, he ripped out one of Manata's wings.

The demon's scream echoed through the sky. Blood streamed from his back like ribbons of red silk. The pair began to fall, tumbling violently as Xander looked down upon the chaos below.

"I knew you were confident in your ability to decay anything. But my role in my party is a tank, and I've faced abuse far worse than you."

He twisted the demon's horns again, forcing Manata to spin midair as he redirected their descent. The wind howled in their ears, tearing at their armor and faces as the battlefield grew larger beneath them.

Down below, a single faceless enemy stood untouched amidst the carnage, his presence overwhelming every survivor still clinging to life.

That was Xander's true target. Amon, the unknown ruler. The entity that had killed his brother.

The object of his vengeance.

He had tried to be patient, waiting for Damon to arrive so they could strike together. But patience had left him.

His great enemy was here. Winning and Dominating all before him. Why would he wait any longer?

Xander's eyes burned with fury. Manata had never been his opponent, merely a stepping stone to reach Amon.

Perhaps even Xander didn't realize how dishonorable that was to use another warrior, even a demon, as a means to an end. But honor meant nothing compared to vengeance.

Manata roared as they plummeted, trying to resist the wind, but Xander increased his own gravity, dragging them both down like a falling meteor.

From above, Xander didn't even wait to hit the ground. He hurled his spear downward with all his strength, aiming straight for Amon.

The weapon screamed through the air, glowing with condensed gravity. Xander leapt from Manata's body mid-fall, letting the demon crash ahead of him.

Amon raised his head slightly. His hand moved almost lazily. The spear met his grip with a metallic shriek, then stopped cold.

He tossed it aside while sidestepping a lightning bolt from Leona, who charged with terrifying ferocity.

Manata crashed into the ground towards Amon, his body broken. The shockwave cracked the battlefield. Dust and debris rose in waves.

Amon extended his arm and caught the falling demon by the throat. His boots skidded back a few meters from the impact, but he didn't fall. His strength seemed beyond reason.

Manata's eyes flickered open, trembling with relief when he realized who was holding him.

"Lord Amon..." he breathed, barely conscious, grateful to still be alive.

But Amon's gaze was cold.

"It seems you are fated to die by my hand after all."

Manata didn't understand. He tried to speak, but before he could, Amon's grip tightened. Frost crept across his neck, spreading rapidly as his eyes bulged.

The sound of cracking ice followed. His throat froze solid, and in the next instant, his body shattered into countless small icicles that scattered across the ground.

Amon brushed his hand as if wiping away dust, indifferent to the death of one of his own.

Xander landed hard, his armor digging into the earth. He rose slowly, his breath ragged, fury burning behind his eyes.

"Amon... remember me! Your reckoning has come for the death of my brother, Godric Ravenscroft!"

Amon turned to face him, unmoved.

"Do I know you? Godric... doesn't ring a bell."

He stood tall and shadowed, the air around him heavy and cold.

"I've killed many people's brothers. Am I supposed to remember every nobody's life I take? What makes yours worth remembering?"

Xander's voice trembled as he answered. "Nothing.... After today ..you will remember."

His eyes shook with rage, and grief.

This was the entity that had killed his brother and he didn't even care.

Chapter 726: Legacy Of Sunwarden

Radiant flashes of light were followed by the screams of the goddess races who dared to face this demon. He disappeared and appeared at will, his movements swift and unpredictable, like a phantom of light.

His wings gleamed radiant and bright almost making him seem holy to those unfortunate enough to witness him.

But the light that traveled from his body was not warm and healing. It was the final flash before permanent darkness, a radiant death.

Vibrating sounds of light waves tore through the air, each wave traveling faster than sight could track, ripping enemies apart with merciless precision. The scent of burnt flesh and ozone hung thick in the chaos.

A blurry man with a shield tried to react, but he was too slow. A beam of light struck his head, and like a melon, it burst apart.

The charred smell mingled with smoke and ash across the battlefield, his death just one of many in this blood-soaked ground.

The young Adramelech advanced, armor gleaming as he unleashed radiant blasts that painted the sky with death. Each flash marked the end of a life. Blood splattered across his face, mixing with soot and dust, yet the small smile that formed betrayed no remorse.

He could see it, the demons had advanced, their raw firepower overwhelming, the goddess races.

Raising his sword of light, he prepared to cleave through a pale-faced young man locked in battle with a demon beast. But before he could strike, a golden flash cut across his vision.

Rolling across the dirt, he barely managed to evade, stopping just in time to see the figure who dared strike him.

"Hmph." He chuckled, brushing dirt from his armor.

"Ahh, the daughter of the Golden Death... Evangeline Brightwater. It seems you have come to die."

Evangeline stood bloodied, her aura trembling between second and third class.

"Funny," she said, her sword raised and voice steady. "I was about to say the same thing."

She pointed her blade directly at him. "Adramelech, I challenge you to a battle to the death."

The roars and chaos of war raged behind them, but Haskell stood unmoved, wings folding slightly as he answered.

"Adramelech is the title my father held before he was killed. My name is Haskell Adramelech." He lifted his sword, the light from its edge reflecting in his eyes.

"That title now belongs to someone else, all because of you Brightwaters."

Evangeline's golden eyes narrowed. "Then is this a question of vengeance?"

He took his stance, light rippling across his armor.

"I could say it's not, but I'd be lying. This is personal... killing you is personal."

Evangeline clenched her fist. "Then is this your attempt at justice?"

Haskell frowned, confused by her tone. "Yes, this is justice. My justice."

He charged, his radiant sword colliding with her golden one, sparks scattering through the air like stars.

"Your justice?" Evangeline parried, her voice sharp.

"What about ours? My grandfather only killed Adramelech because he murdered my grandmother, she wasn't even a warrior. Is that justice?"

She swung downward, her blade sending a streak of golden light that carved into the ground. Fighters too close to the clash were vaporized in the wake of their power.

Haskell countered with a volley of radiant beams, but Evangeline deflected them with precise sweeps, her movements flawless. Each impact scorched the ground, painting the battlefield in blinding light that glittered against the smoke and darkness.

"Yes! That's justice!" Haskell shouted. "That is what justice is!"

"Your predecessor was in the wrong," Evangeline shot back. "He started the bloodshed. My grandfather brought justice."

"Ha! Justice?" Haskell's laughter echoed, unhinged.

"Tell that to the millions who burned in the Battle of Dying Suns. Tell that to the lands now turned to immolating hell. Tell that to the people who became refugees because of that so-called justice!"

He sneered, his wings spreading wide.

"What you call justice is nothing but revenge, you human bitch! It's the same endless cycle, revenge dressed as righteousness!"

He rose into the air, his voice booming across the field.

"Justice is retribution! Think about it—it's never about mercy. It's about punishment. About ensuring the guilty suffer! Is that not vengeance?"

"The trials against perceived evil, the court, and the justice system are all about bringing punishment... not equity or forgiveness."

Evangeline froze for a moment, her ideals crushed under his words. His voice pierced through her heart, twisting everything she believed. Yet as her hands trembled, she steadied herself.

She had heard this before doubt, mockery, contradiction and every time, she had risen stronger or changed for the better.

She would not falter here.

"I understand it now," she said softly, her voice clear.

"You may be right. I agree, justice is retribution. Justice demands that evil be punished, not guilt. Justice demands that the wicked do not walk free after their wrongs."

Her hand rested on her chest as a soft golden glow spread from her heart.

"Justice is blind, not heartless. And if it is heartless, then I shall be its heart. I will uphold what I believe is righteous."

Her aura flared, golden radiance surging higher and higher until the air itself trembled.

"I will be the warden that brings retribution!"

The heavens answered her. Golden light illuminated the sky as a whisper echoed in her mind, the voice of the world itself.

[You walk the footsteps of she who remained true even in rot. You have inherited the legacy of the Ascendant who walked in the sun even while she burned.]

[You have awakened the unique class: Sunwarden.]

[Class Skill: Retribution — Bringer of Justice, Warden of Carnage.]

[Your fable grows.]

The battlefield stilled for a heartbeat.

Evangeline stood radiant, her form almost celestial. Before Haskell could even adjust to her brilliance, she vanished from sight.

In a blur of motion, she crossed the distance, light incarnate.

Haskell's eyes widened as he turned. For an instant, he tried to speak, confusion flashing in his gaze. Then he saw it, her sword had already passed through him.

He looked down at his chest, watching blood pour freely. His head fell before his body hit the ground.

Evangeline lowered her blade, her expression unreadable, and walked away as his body disintegrated into dust and ash.

Justice had been the end of his retribution.

Chapter 727: Starburst

"Aaghr.."

The scream of Bakemon's most recent foe tore through the air, echoing across the blood-soaked plain. The sound was wet and guttural.

The kind of death cry that clawed at the spine. The body hit the ground with a dull thud, entrails spilling across broken earth.

Yet Bakemon didn't even flinch. His crimson eyes were cold, indifferent, as if the act of killing had long lost its meaning.

The goddess-race champions who had assembled to face him lay scattered like broken dolls. All were dead, except one.

A lone woman with violet hair stood amidst the carnage, her expression calm, her eyes fixed on him.

Even when the others attacked, she remained still, watching detached, silent almost unreadable.

Everyone else had fought desperately for their lives. But not her. The reason was simple, no one sensed her. Even standing so close, it was as though she didn't exist at all.

Bakemon only noticed her because he had come near enough to see what others could not.

He turned his gaze past her, to the far edge of the battlefield, where the priestess from the Snake Temple was convulsing violently. The sight was strange, her body twisting under a surge of energy that shimmered like heat over sand.

"What do you think she's doing?"

The violet-haired woman finally spoke. Her voice was calm, melodic, almost bored. Bakemon recognized her now, Renata Malcrist.

It was rare for him to remember names, but this one had been drilled into him. Renata was powerful, one of the few he was warned about.

The Malcrist household had existed for centuries in Valtheron. Their true origins were murky, yet somehow always there since the dawn of the Third Epoch. Some whispered they rose from the peasant revolution; others believed they predated it entirely.

Their lineage was recorded with an details rivaling that of the Imperial Family and the Four Grand Duchies.

'Why would Paimon be interested in them...?'

In this generation, Renata was the last of her bloodline.

Bakemon's attention drifted back to the priestess in the distance.

"I wouldn't know," he replied, his tone casual but wary.

"The priestesses of the Snake Temple have always been mysterious... even to us."

Renata's brow furrowed slightly. Damon had tasked her to watch the priestess closely and to kill her, if ordered. Yet he'd also given her freedom to act on her own judgment. This was her primary mission here.

"The witches of the Snake Temple," she murmured, "who wield mysterious and unexpected phenomena. I've heard how dangerous they can be on the battlefield."

Bakemon studied her closely. Her presence unsettled him. Like him, she wielded a conceptual attribute hers was called Zero.

"Yes," she continued softly, "the Unknown God rarely answers, but when the priestess calls... he listens. Or so we are taught."

She spoke without looking at him, the papers in her hand fluttering gently in the wind a strange contrast to the chaos around them. She looked more like a scholar than a killer, if not for the subtle aura that distorted the air around her.

"Her attribute... seems rare," Renata said, her tone cautious.

"A Star attribute. The Snake Temple venerates the stars, she must be very treasured."

He inched closer, each step silent, predatory.

A battle against Renata Malcris would be dangerous, he knew that. To survive, he'd have to end it with a single, decisive strike.

"I imagine she is," Bakemon replied calmly.

"Though I wouldn't know. I'm not of the temple. Still, it baffles me that such a temple exists at all. The Unknown God cares little for worship."

Bakemon took another step closer.

"The temple is more for the goddess — and for control," he said.

"A desire to command others in the name of a god."

Renata still didn't turn, though her eyes gleamed faintly. A single bead of sweat rolled down her chin.

"That sounds like blasphemy," she whispered. "You could be killed for that."

Bakemon smiled.

"That only happens to your goddess followers," he said, his tone almost amused.

"The Unknown God is open to criticism. He is imperfect like all things, forever growing."

He raised his hand, fingers curling into a claw.

"And what grows... dies!"

In an instant, he blurred a streak of white cutting through the air. The ground cracked beneath his feet as he moved, faster than sight, reaching for her throat.

Renata released the papers in her hand. The moment they slipped free, time itself seemed to slow. Her lips curved into a smile.

Bakemon's fist tore through the falling papers but then halted, frozen mid-air. His entire force, his magic, everything... had been reduced to zero.

Before he could react, Renata's palm struck.

Her hand punched through his chest with a sickening crack. Bakemon was hurled backward, blood spraying like mist, a gaping hole where his heart should have been.

She smirked, lowering her hand.

"I set everything to zero except that paper," she said coldly.

"Gave it mass, density, made it as solid and immovable as I wished."

Bakemon coughed violently, clutching his chest as blood poured between his fingers.

"That has to... be breaking all physical laws," he wheezed.

Renata merely shrugged.

"Actually, it's magic. Isn't that what magic is?" she replied.

"Doing whatever you please. As a fellow mage, I'm surprised you let yourself be so restricted. Everything and anything is possible with magic."

Bakemon laughed weakly, the sound hollow and rasping.

"Well played... I underestimated you. Now I understand why they call you the Mage Killer... next time."

Renata's face hardened.

"There won't be a next time."

He chuckled, even as blood dripped from his mouth.

"Till we meet again."

Bakemon pulled a staff from his back and tapped it to the ground.

"Order."

A surge of light erupted, swallowing him whole and when it faded, he was gone.

Renata exhaled, scanning the area, her eyes sharp.

"He can't have gone far," she murmured. "The combat zone's sealed. And he's bleeding out."

She paused, thinking.

'I can't leave, I still need to watch the priestess.'

'One of Baal's children... he's powerful, but Lord Ashcroft is still superior.'

Her thoughts were interrupted when a red-haired woman entered the battlefield in the distance.

Renata's expression soured.

"Lilith Astranova," she muttered, her tone faintly irritated.

But then the priestess stopped convulsing.

Renata turned sharply. A second presence appeared from the opposite side a young woman with snow-white hair.

Sylvia Moonveil.

The instant Sylvia appeared, the priestess drew a knife and slit her own wrist.

Renata's eyes widened. She moved to intervene but something slammed into her from the side, sending her crashing through stone.

Bakemon stood there again, blood dripping down his chin, smiling wickedly.

"I knew you'd let your guard down."

Renata coughed blood, vision swimming.

The priestess's body glowed and a pillar of starlight erupted skyward.

The heavens themselves shifted. The entire battlefield froze as the light spread, painting the sky in billions of stars.

"Damn it..." Renata whispered.

The final act had begun. The world itself trembled as the stars wept and from the horizon, a figure rode forth upon a Wendigo, its roar shaking the heavens.

Damon had arrived.

Chapter 728: Aggression

Xander was bleeding from head to toe, his armor dented in several places and frozen partially.

Steam hissed from the cracks in his armor, the mingled scent of blood and frost heavy in the air.

The battlefield trembled beneath the clash of distant spells, the sky above flashing with lightning and shards of magical fire. Yet Xander stood there, firm, his breath ragged but his eyes fierce with hatred.

"You took everything from me."

Amon glanced at him, unmoved. His body radiated an eerie chill, the mist around him glimmering faintly with blue frost.

"I don't even know who you are."

He waved his hand lazily and ice spears materialized in the air, sharp as razors, before shooting toward Xander.

The spears cracked the ground where they struck, sending freezing winds spiraling outward.

Xander raised his shield, blocking the first barrage as the impact shook his arm violently.

Cold air spread in all directions as Xander covered the others, the shockwave forming a dome of mist and frost around them.

Abellona was burnt out, her wings of destruction flickering weakly.

The radiant feathers that once incinerated entire lines of enemies now dimmed to dull crimson. She had given everything, yet Amon still stood. His body was broken multiple times, his arms destroyed and his flesh shattered, but each time he simply absorbed the remains of the fallen, reconstructing himself from their corpses.

'We need to kill him with a single move or do enough damage that he can't regenerate.'

The problem was how. Just as that thought crossed her mind, a blinding beam of light shot toward Amon, followed by golden flares bursting through the air like falling stars.

The brightness painted the battlefield in gold, the scorched ground gleaming beneath the radiance. Balls of pure light struck him faster than he could react, throwing him backward several paces, his hidden armor cracking under the heat.

Evangeline streaked toward him, her movements a golden blur, streaks of light trailing behind her.

Amon unleashed a wave of frost in retaliation, the ground erupting with jagged ice spikes that spread across the area like a blooming flower of death.

The entire radius froze solid, but Evangeline pressed through, her light melting the frost as it touched her.

Amon—or rather, Damon—was growing irritated. He hadn't killed them yet because every survivor of the Amon subjugation force was someone close to him, people he didn't want dead. With the sole exception of Velora Nyxfall. Damon didn't care if Velora lived or died.

However, killing him outright would raise suspicions, so he restrained himself.

Evangeline had reached the third class. Damon had doubted it before, but now her power left no room for denial.

Her aura burned bright and powerful, radiant and beautiful. She moved faster than before, her presence overwhelming.

Damon could sense her light, but not fast enough to fully dodge it.

She was aggressive, her joining the fight shifting the tide. Her glow extended to Xander, whose body, though injured, seemed to endure far more than any human should.

His first-class skill turned him into a living bulwark, hard to permanently destroy.

Her second-class skill, Dawn Bringer, wasn't known for offense but for its miraculous healing. The healing skill she had purchased for the class amplified its potency. As soon as her light touched them, their wounds sealed, bruises vanished, and shattered bones knitted together.

'Suppose this is why it's always better to kill the healer first.'

But that wasn't what made her dangerous. Damon's danger sense screamed at him, she could do far worse than heal.

Evangeline raised her sword, and radiant light exploded across the ground where Amon stood moments before.

Leona lifted her hand, summoning a bolt of lightning that streaked through the air and struck him squarely.

The thunderclap deafened those nearby as Amon gritted his teeth, smoke curling from his body as he fell to one knee. His muscles trembled from the shock, yet he stood again, his fury palpable.

Good thing she was in the second class or that could have killed him.

Then Evangeline's aura intensified. Her sword gleamed brighter than the sun as she invoked her third-class skill. The radiance surged, engulfing her entirely in golden light before she swung, unleashing a blinding arc of light that roared across the battlefield.

Damon's heart constricted. His instincts screamed. Every nerve in his body burned as his danger sense erupted.

"What... the hell was that..."

The light engulfed him. His entire form convulsed as searing pain tore through him, the radiance burning not just his body but his very soul.

His true body, hidden deep within the forest, screamed in agony as his freshly healed soul took immense damage.

But that was not the end. His mind twisted, his memories shattered, and suddenly his consciousness was dragged into visions of his past sins.

He saw himself in a forest, standing over the corpse of Carmen Vale, the day he murdered her.

The memory struck like a hammer. Shame, guilt, and self-hatred surged within him.

He looked down and saw a sword buried in his chest, blood dripping from the wound. When he raised his gaze, he saw a pink-haired girl before him, her eyes wet with tears as her sword pierced deeper.

His eyes widened, then the illusion faded. It was Evangeline before him, her golden blade lodged in his chest. The pain, the shame, the vision, it was all part of her power.

He gripped her blade with his hands, trembling.

"What... skill was that..."

The light burned through his chest, smoke rising from the wound as Evangeline's golden eyes glared at him.

"It's my third-class skill, Retribution. It punishes all who are guilty. As they burn, they see their own crimes."

Damon staggered back, laughing darkly through the pain.

"Well played..."

Then his faceless form began to distort. He grabbed her neck, his silhouette expanding and twisting grotesquely as overwhelming power erupted from within him.

[Ravenous]

He transformed into living shadow, roaring like a beast as his voice shattered the air. The ground quaked beneath his presence.

'Did she really think I'd let her come between me and my money?'

It had been a collective effort to weaken him, but Damon had no intention of falling.

Killing Amon was worth twenty billion zeni, and no ideal or blood tie would make him surrender that prize.

He grabbed Evangeline and slammed her head into the ground, the earth cracking under the force. Then he swung her by the legs, smashing her into the dirt left and right like a rag doll. Blood splattered across the frozen ground as her body went limp.

He lifted her by the head, her body dangling, barely conscious. His voice softened, almost regretful.

Honestly, it was nothing personal. Evangeline was his cousin, and he loved her dearly. But the money for Amon's head was too great. She didn't need that kind of burden anyway.

'It hurts me more than it hurts her.'

He squeezed her throat with one hand as she struggled, her face turning purple, blood dripping from her lips.

Her light flickered weakly in her hand.

Xander and Leona charged forward, their faces twisted in desperation, but Damon used Evangeline's body as a weapon, swinging her like a blade to knock them away.

Both were sent tumbling through the debris.

Despair filled their eyes. For all intents and purposes, it looked like Evangeline would die by Amon's hands.

The world seemed to stop. The sky above burst open with countless stars as the priestess in the distance performed a ritual.

The battlefield fell silent, warriors pausing mid-strike, their gazes drawn upward in awe and dread.

Evangeline's light faded. Leona and Xander stood helpless, unable to move, while Abellona and Velora were helpless to do anything.

Damon formed a spear of ice, its edge glimmering coldly as he aimed it at Evangeline's throat.

Just as he was about to strike, the thunderous roar of a Wendigo echoed across the field, shaking the heavens.

From the far edge, Damon's true body appeared his real self. In one swift motion, he teleported in front of the monstrous Amon and swung his sword, severing his arm cleanly.

He caught Evangeline before she fell, holding her gently. His expression was grim, quiet rage simmering behind his eyes.

Carrying her to Leona and laid her down softly, brushing the dirt and blood from her face.

Her eyes fluttered open weakly. "Da... Damon..."

He smiled faintly, voice low. "Eva... I'm here."

Placing his forehead against hers, he squeezed her hand. Feeding her a high-level potion, he watched the glow return to her skin as her wounds mended slowly.

Then he rose, turning to face Amon.

"Leona, take care of her."

His gaze hardened.

"I'll take care of this."

Amon grinned, his shadow writhing behind him.

"Hahahaha... Finally, a worthy opponent. Our battle will be legendary."

Damon narrowed his eyes. Faceless was making his clone a bit more aggressive than he intended.

'I should end things now.'

Chapter 729: Old Warning

His head felt heavy, more so from Evangeline's attack than anything else... but also from the overuse of Faceless.

This battle had seemed easy, yet three people had come close to destroying his avatar. If they had attacked at the same time with better coordination, they might have actually succeeded.

The first was Abellona. Her Wings of Destruction made her truly deadly. Luckily for him, he knew how it worked having seen her use it before and he knew she could only maintain it for a limited time.

Too bad she had once told him the wings had a fatal weakness: if she used them beyond their limit, her own destructive power would consume and kill her.

That was why he had only evaded her, weaving past her attacks until she exhausted herself.

The next was Leona. Her power was dangerous enough too bad she was only in the second class.

Her most recent blast of lightning would have killed him if she were in the third class.

Too bad indeed.

That said, she did create an opening for Evangeline to strike, and that attack had truly done damage.

Damon—or rather Amon—had to retaliate with extreme prejudice against her power. Evangeline was dangerously powerful... or rather, she was a terrible matchup for Damon.

It was like how someone with a normal fire attribute didn't stand a chance against someone with an ice attribute, it was a natural counter. While his attribute was Umbral and hers Light, that wasn't the reason. The reason was simpler.

Justice and guilt.

The final reason for such a ruthless attack... Damon realized he was losing his identity under the effect of the Faceless skill.

In his heart, he was starting to believe he truly was Amon, a demon lord.

Damon was still in control of himself, but that seed was there.

If he didn't deactivate Faceless soon, he would be in serious trouble.

The only problem was... Damon couldn't deactivate it while standing on a battlefield, with everyone watching.

The stars in the sky glowed with an unusual light, as if they would explode. The darkness and flames from the battle were illuminated by white starlight.

Everyone held their breath. This would be the battle that determined the fate of all present here.

If Damon killed Amon, the goddess races would be victorious. If he failed and perished here, they would be wiped out.

His form was cloaked by rippling shadows as he faced off against Amon, who was surrounded by something akin to dark mist. He—or it—could not be seen or perceived properly.

However, his power left no question.

Damon glanced at his system window. He had already completed the second act of his quest.

Now came the third, and hopefully the last act. He looked at it, his expression narrowing.

Ominous was an understatement.

Quest Act Three – [Despair]

Once more, I oblige. Heed my warning. Your perils have only begun.

Objective: Survive the Feast of Nightmares.

Rewards:

You live.

Failure:

Eternal damnation, forever dreaming a nameless nightmare.

The quest was literally called Despair, and living was its own reward. What kind of horrible quest was that? Normally, Damon was given some kind of appealing reward, a skill, an item, something.

But this... this was as if surviving whatever was coming was the reward itself.

Damon's danger sense screamed that this wasn't good, and he was right. He didn't look away from Amon, glancing briefly at Abellona.

"Kill that priestess before she completes whatever ritual she's doing... I'll kill Amon."

Abellona nodded. His words, though calm, echoed across the silent battlefield for all to hear.

The goddess races knew they had to kill the priestess, and the demons knew they had to protect her.

His skin crawled, his unease deepening after those words left his mouth.

It was only after saying them that he realized they changed nothing, it only made his danger sense worse.

Which meant killing her might not even change the outcome.

He didn't have time to waste. He would end this quickly.

"We both know that won't work," Amon spoke, though in truth Damon was just talking to himself.

'It's too late. I know that... besides, I wonder how this affects my own plans,' he thought to himself as the world around them exploded into a fevered battle for the priestess.

Amon raised his hand, laughing as he charged at Damon with a sword of ice. Damon flash-stepped forward, and the battle began, with his own self.

A farce he could not stop.

He was an actor in a play of his own folly, dancing in a script written by a god who had mastered cunning, guile, and manipulation. His strings were fate itself, and everyone here was a puppet.

Like how puppets could not seize the strings, so too mortals, their resistance was futile.

Still, Damon didn't care. He clashed with himself.

Fate was everywhere, it lived in their actions and their choices. This wasn't the unknown god's will; this was Damon's choice. His choice to be here. His choice to fight his own clone, manipulating everyone for his own ends.

In the end, he would only regret the choices he didn't make.

Wherever this road led wouldn't matter soon, when he got his hands on the cure for his sister.

He would die.

That was the ultimate middle finger he could give to the unknown god who had written this script.

Can't have a story without a main character to drive the narrative, overcome obstacles, and reach the ending.

This wasn't suicide, it was his defiance.

"If I'm going to lose anyway... I'll lose on my own terms. Only my own terms."

The defiant mortal who would rather choose his own end than be dragged down the god's path.

His sword clashed with Amon's, creating massive astral winds that roared all around them. His long hair whipped in the storm as he watched the faceless mirror of himself, dancing to his whims, struggling as its identity corroded.

What a fitting foe to fight.

'Who else could fight me but myself... who else must I overcome?'

Chapter 730: Not Part Of The Plan

Black flames rose in a pillar as the air rapidly heated. Ice clashed with the flames, and a devastating expulsion consumed the battlefield, reaping lives from the sheer carnage.

Amon was pushed back by the clash, while Damon was sent flying, rolling on the dirt as he struggled to regain his footing. His face was slightly scraped from the attack, his breath heavy.

This was how his attacks felt to other people...

Damon charged forward, swinging his sword in a crisscrossing arc. Slashes flew through the air as flames roared to life around him, wrapping Damon in immolating heat that spread with a soul-chilling coldness.

But Amon didn't move. He just stood there in his ravenous form as the flames consumed him.

The black fire rose to the heavens in a cyclone of destruction that wiped out everything around it.

At the edge of the devastation, lying among charred corpses, a man with half his legs blown away by the aftermath of the battle watched in horror. Fear filled his eyes, his mouth hanging agape.

"Are... they even still in the third class? How can these monsters be in the same rank as us?"

It was as if the entire concept of rank no longer applied. Their power had already surpassed what their classifications suggested.

A third class was powerful, but this devastation was already bordering on the fourth class, the power to level cities and crush mountains.

Watching the flames consume Amon, tears spilled from the wounded man's eyes as hope renewed in his heart.

The unstoppable demon Amon had finally met his match. His body would be burned to ash...

Or so he hoped, until he heard a calm voice echo from within the flames.

"Dominate."

The black fire that had burned all around him rolled and coiled into Amon's palms. Then, those very flames were hurled toward Damon in a massive, one-sided explosion.

"Still using the same tricks, I see... You rely on power stolen from others."

Damon frowned as the magical orbs broadcasting the fight zoomed in on his face, an expression caught between shock and dread.

He subconsciously stepped back, the world watching as even in the heat of combat, Damon faltered.

"Yo...u... no, it can't be. It couldn't be... I... I destroyed you!"

Amon stood amidst the ashes, laughing with a low rumble.

"I cannot be destroyed by mere mortals."

Damon's teeth clenched, his eyes widening. "Damn you, Ashcroft..."

"Hahahahahaha!" Amon's laughter thundered, his hand rising as everyone who heard that voice went pale with fear.

Amon was terrifying enough already but he had been unknown until now. Ashcroft, however, was a name all too familiar. The greatest of all demon lords... the invincible one.

Outside in the arena, Paimon stood, her eyes trembling with shock.

"The Demon Lord of Domination... so that's why I was brought here..."

The emperor, Kronos, ground his teeth in a mixture of fear and rage.

"Ashcroft... he really did return..."

In the Ravenscroft Pavilion, the old grand duke, Godwin Corbin Ravenscroft, rose sharply to his feet.

"We have to break open the arena and stop this! Ashcroft will kill them all!"

The crowd erupted in disbelief and dread.

"Ashcroft is a myth! I can't believe he's real!"

"It's over for the goddess races! He'll enslave and kill us all!"

"The goddess will destroy him again!"

"Father Dantalion save us."

Mixed voices of panic and denial filled the air until the Grand Duke Brightwater spoke.

"Ashcroft has returned, that much is true. However, you have nothing to fear. His last return ended in defeat at the hands of a young warrior of the goddess races."

He chuckled, suppressing the unease in his voice.

"The great Ashcroft was defeated by a mere child. He's a legend past his time, watch him fall again."

All eyes turned toward the projection as the Grand Duke silently prayed to the goddess.

"Ahahahaha... You damaged my main soul, and so I was forced into slumber. But that is not enough to stop me..."

Damon gritted his teeth, raising his sword.

"I see... I understand now. Even if I kill you here, you won't die, unless your main soul is found and destroyed."

Amon's lips curved slightly. Damon almost couldn't stop the faint smile on his own face. He had just increased the perceived danger of his opponent while also clarifying the mystery of Amon.

"I can't have them digging in the wrong direction."

This way, the value of his shadow clone Amon wouldn't matter. Even if they killed it, they would believe it only delayed the real Ashcroft.

"No pointing, hunting and killing a mere projection."

Damon wanted them to go on a wild goose chase... chasing a ghost that didn't exist.

Now it was time for Damon to start losing until he found a reason to "believe in himself," or some other heroic nonsense.

Sure enough. Amon, his shadow clone, rushed forward before Damon could react. His sword pierced Damon's chest, though Damon tried to shadow-stride as it passed through.

Amon grabbed his head and slammed a knee into Damon's nose. Blood gushed as the world spun from the blow.

Damon felt dizzy, maybe even concussed but he couldn't stop. He had to sell the act.

Flames roared to life as Amon burned him in a smoldering sphere of destruction.

Damon struggled to resist, to parry but Amon was the better fighter. Their battle raged across the field, killing both friend and foe in its wake.

Abellona gritted her teeth as she and the others fought through the demons only she made it past..Reaching the priestess.

Her eyes gleamed as she saw Damon bleeding, one eye shut from blood, his body bruised as Amon smashed, burned, and froze him.

She gritted her teeth harder. Her job was to kill the priestess. She had to believe Damon would survive.

Amon laughed darkly.

"How does it feel to face me without a timer counting down to my demise? This may be a weak projection of my power, but..."

He grabbed Damon by the nape, slamming his head against a boulder.

"It's more than enough for the likes of you."

"Now... you die."

Damon struggled weakly as despair filled the eyes of all who watched.

Ahh... it was beautiful. Seeing his own face covered in blood. Now all that was left was for Renata to follow the script, say something inspiring to motivate him.

Then he'd win and finish off Amon.

Silence fell as Amon tossed him to the ground.

"Your legend ends here as one of countless stepping stones."

Amon conjured a sword of ice, raising it to finish Damon—

—when a stone struck him.

He easily tanked it, surprised. This wasn't part of the script.

Amon turned to find Waton, covered in blood, a rock in his trembling hands. Tears streamed down his face.

He roared with all he had, voice cracking under fear and rage.

"Let go of my friend, you demon bastard!"

Waton was terrified, utterly terrified but still, he stood there alone before Amon, the avatar of Ashcroft the Dominator.

One man, facing what could only be called the strongest. All for a friend he barely knew.

From the ground, Damon stared at him.

This... was not part of his plan.