

Shadow 731

Chapter 731: The Greatest Accomplishment

Watson was afraid. He bit his lip, staring at Amon in front of him and in that instant, he understood what it felt like to face death.

In his heart, he felt all the ways he could die. In his mind, he saw every possible way it would happen.

Watson was a prince of Valtheron. Among all the emperor's children, he was the only one who shared the same attribute as his father, the Time Attribute.

He had time... yet it was never enough. Watson was a slow learner. His other siblings were brilliant, eloquent, and filled with talent.

Watson was the one exception. What his siblings could grasp in minutes, Watson would take days to understand.

He tried gods, he tried staying up longer, working harder. But he was always the laggard, the one who was too slow.

He could still remember the disappointment in his father's eyes, the whispers in the palace. No one respected him.

'You will never accomplish anything of worth.'

And as time passed, his siblings earned accolades, fought battles, grew stronger while no matter how hard he ran, Watson could never catch up.

That was why he wished for time to stop.

"Stop time..." he muttered.

It was a bad habit of his. Every time he felt afraid or inadequate, he'd whisper those words, a prayer that time would halt. But even with the Time Attribute, time never listened.

The hourglass was beyond his control.

And when it finally stopped, that would mean his own time had ended, for time was all he had. Time to study when no one was watching. Time to try harder and still be called incompetent.

Amon's faceless form turned from Damon, walking toward Waton. A terrible killing intent washed over him.

His knees trembled.

Life truly was flashing before his eyes as tears streamed down his face.

His father had told him not to come to the war games. Said he wasn't a fighter. That he should leave the real battles to warriors.

Waton's heart pounded painfully in his chest.

"I'm... too dull to be a scholar... yet too weak and cowardly to be a warrior..." he whispered, his lungs filling with the metallic scent of blood, every word soaked with years of buried grief.

"I always try my best... I always give my all... but I'm never enough. I'm used to losing. I'm the oddball who never fits in. I have no one who genuinely sees value in my life... I can never accomplish anything."

He wanted to move, to scream, to run and hide but his body refused to listen. His legs felt frozen to the ground, heavy as lead.

A cold sensation crawled through his veins, as if his limbs no longer belonged to him.

Bitter tears spilled down his cheeks. He didn't want to die. He wanted to live but he was sick and tired of living as if he were already dead.

Maybe that was why he'd come to like Damon. It wasn't just because Damon had flattered him or played nice.

It was because Damon simply did whatever he wanted. He was fearless, reckless, someone who laughed in the face of reason and followed his own ideals.

Watson had never been like that. Damon was more than brave, he was defiant. Someone who refused to bend or conform to the world.

There was madness in it, yes... but seeing it had awakened something inside Watson.

Amon raised his sword of ice. Of everything that had happened in this battle, this was the one thing that confused him most, so he asked.

"Why?"

Watson sniffed, his hand trembling, his face pale. He had only survived this long thanks to Matia and Wendy protecting him.

"He said... we were friends..."

His voice cracked. "I've never had a friend... What greater accomplishment could be nobler than giving my life for a friend?"

No one had ever called him that before.

Amon froze. And Damon, lying on the ground covered in burns and blood, felt his eyes widen.

A memory flickered in his mind, a certain girl he had once been exploiting, who had shed tears for him... and called him her friend.

Leona.

She had been the first genuine thing he'd ever had in this world, the storm that brought rain to the desert of his heart.

Hearing Waton, someone he had merely intended to use stand up for him, something stirred in Damon's chest.

"Hah... ahahahaha..." Damon chuckled softly, forcing his battered body to rise.

"Right... we're friends."

When Damon stood, Waton was no longer afraid. He believed no, he knew his friend would save him.

The audience erupted in cheers when Damon got back on his feet. Renata, still locked in battle with a demon kin beside the priestess, couldn't intervene for this part of the plan.

Damon raised his hand, launching a magic missile that seared through the air toward Amon.

Amon slashed it apart with his sword, but the explosion sent shockwaves all around him.

Damon took a step forward, grabbing Waton and moving him out of harm's way.

"Are... y-you okay?" Waton asked weakly.

Damon sneered. "Do I look okay? I'm in pain, dammit. But way better than you looks like you almost pissed yourself. Show-off."

He glanced at Waton. " You'll die someday, but today isn't that day, that I promise you.

This was the promise Damon made to the foolish prince who had become his friend.

Damon was smiling. Really smiling. It wasn't his usual manipulative grin, this one was real.

"Can... you beat him?" Waton asked, more out of worry for Damon than fear of the outcome.

'Ahh... this guy. He really grew on me. Well, I don't mind keeping him alive.'

Waton didn't know what Damon was thinking.

"Do I look like someone who loses?" Damon replied with a smirk.

"You were losing though," Waton muttered, raising a hand, only for Damon to smack it down.

"I was setting a trap, idiot! One you just ruined. Just step back, I'll end this now."

Amon shook off the blast and charged toward Damon.

"Time to end this," Damon said, pressing his palms together.

Balls of mana began to appear all around him, the energy colliding and folding into itself as the air distorted under the pressure. The spheres turned into glowing runes, and the runes spelled a single word: sword.

Hundreds of black, shadowy blades made of pure mana materialized in the air.

Damon raised his hand.

[Magical Arsenal]

Chapter 732: The Priestess Who Prays For Peace Summons Despair.

War was chaotic, but everyone had their roles to play. Victory was the result of the collective.

Abellona had her role, so she didn't turn, even when Damon seemed to falter in his battle against Amon.

He had won against Ashcroft when he was far weaker than he was now, she believed he wouldn't die. That was why, even though her own brother's life was in danger, Abellona focused solely on her mission, her objective.

This was what her life on the battlefield had taught her.

'we must all play our roles, or the entire military structure will collapse.'

Blood dripped from the side of her head as she ignored the clash behind her. The sounds of battle, the screams, the explosions, all faded. Only the priestess remained in her eyes.

She walked slowly with her spear in hand, blood dripping from its edge, her crimson eyes filled with killing intent.

In her heart, she believed stopping the priestess would guarantee victory.

The priestess was a beautiful young woman. Her long hair flowed to the ground, and her eyes glittered like stars. It was her ritual that had transformed the heavens into that starry sky.

"Is it not beautiful..." the priestess' soft voice echoed.

Abellona glanced at the sky, bright starlight glittering on a canvas of heavenly darkness. The white light illuminating the void had an ephemeral beauty to it. Like all beautiful things, it would not last.

"I do not much care for the sight," Abellona replied coldly. "The stars are in the heavens... and all my problems are on the earth."

Her tone was soft, but her killing intent bled through each word.

The priestess smiled gently. Blood seeped from her eyes, her nose, and the corners of her mouth, yet she remained calm.

"He loves the stars... I think because he's a star too."

She smiled faintly, her eyes reflecting that same starlight.

"A star is never alone and can't be lonely... that's why..."

Abellona narrowed her eyes, confusion flickering in them.

"He? Who are you referring to—"

"Yes," the priestess interrupted softly, her voice calm and haunting.

"The Unknown God. He was a star among other stars... yet he left. Now he's alone."

Abellona raised her spear, pointing it at the priestess.

"Why aren't you trying to fight back, or escape?"

The priestess glanced at the battlefield, at the chaos, the dying, the endless struggle. She took a slow, shaky breath.

"There's no point... This is my purpose. It's why I was born. Everything you think is significant in life means nothing. The most significant thing you can do in life ... is die."

She smiled faintly and spread her arms.

Abellona bit her lip, unease twisting in her chest.

"Stop your ritual. Now."

The priestess shook her head.

"It's too late. It's already complete. Everything is here. The first ingredient was me, the star."

She raised her hand toward Abellona.

"Destruction, the void, his name and book, the seed of depravity in a heart overflowing with a myriad of desires... and lastly, a pure soul that endured change."

Abellona's hands trembled. Her breathing turned shaky.

Time was her brother, he had the Time Attribute. The star was the priestess herself. Destruction... was Abellona. But what about the rest? She didn't know.

No—she did. The Void referred to Lilith Astranova, the one who carried the void attribute.

But no matter how hard she thought, she couldn't figure out the others.

The priestess's words echoed in her mind: "His name and book..."

Abellona's blood ran cold. To summon something: a god, a demon, a spirit you needed to know its true name.

That realization hit her like thunder. The priestess wasn't performing a ritual, she was attempting to summon the Unknown God.

If a god descended here, it wouldn't just be the end for them, it would be the end of the world.

She gritted her teeth, her body trembling as she thrust her spear forward, impaling the priestess through the heart.

"I can't let you do this! You can't call forth a god!"

The priestess coughed blood, her smile still soft as her lifeblood spilled freely.

"I am not the honored one who knows his name," she whispered weakly. "I am merely the sacrifice..."

Abellona's grip tightened. She twisted the spear, blood splattering the ground.

The priestess's vision dimmed, but her thoughts remained.

The one who knows his name... is Sylvia Moonveil. She alone was cursed with that knowledge. She was also given the Unknown God's Journey Book or rather, a copy of it.

A copy still carried the same power as the original—because knowledge was power.

'The seed of depravity...' the priestess thought, her will fading. 'It lies in Amon's heart.'

He was the heart overflowing with desire, love and hate, greed and joy, despair and hope. He wanted to die, yet still planned for the future.

He hoped to die but still planned for the future.

Seven souls... seven catalysts. Damon, Sylvia, Lilith, Waton, the priestess, Abellona, and Wendy, the pure soul.

The priestess exhaled one last breath. Blood poured freely from her wounds as she whispered, "You... shouldn't have killed me."

Abellona froze.

"My death at your hands was the final trigger... one loved by war will destroy even the stars. The last condition... has been met."

The priestess smiled faintly, then prayed. Her voice was soft, peaceful.

Abellona heard every word of that final prayer. The priestess prayed for peace, for a world where love triumphed and war perished.

When her voice faded, the stars above began to die. Blood, mana, and souls were drawn to her corpse in a spiraling current of light and darkness.

Abellona felt dread, an indescribable, suffocating wrongness that made her hands tremble.

On the opposite end of the battlefield, Sylvia's Journey Book flipped its pages uncontrollably. She felt a forgotten name surface in her mind, and before she could stop herself she spoke it in an almost inaudible whisper.

Lilith screamed as the stigmata on her back burned violently.

Damon, standing amidst the chaos after striking down Amon with his [Magical Arsenal], froze as his shadow writhed, his heart of shadow constricting painfully.

Wendy fell to her knees, crying out in pain as her horns grew slightly.

Watson felt his heartbeat stop for a single moment.

And then everyone did. Watching with horror.

Strings of starlight descended, twisting together like threads of fate, lifting the priestess's corpse into the air. Her eyes opened, pitch black. Darker than the concept of darkness itself.

"Be still."

Her voice was divine yet felt so wrong, as if a million angels were singing but at the same time countless termites were eating at your brain.

And the world obeyed.

No one moved. No one could.

It wasn't just those in the arena, even those watching from outside couldn't move.

A bird frozen mid-flight, the wind itself paused.

Time had stopped.

All who heard that voice could only obey.

Chapter 733: Incomprehensible Acts Of God

"Hmmm... it actually worked..." Her voice was calm but echoed louder than thunder.

Her body seemed to make snapping sounds as the air and world struggled fiercely to endure this entity.

There was a sense of rejection and wrongness, as if this entity should not be here as if the world itself was begging the omniverse to cast out this cancerous being.

Yet the pleas fell on deaf ears.

She raised her hand, and a book appeared before the eyes of all who were watching.

Her gaze turned to Abellona, then reached upward. When she did, Damon felt himself black out, everyone did.

Different balls of light rose from everyone's glabella, illuminating softly over their foreheads.

This very gesture was simple: all their souls were removed from their bodies without killing them.

It was a casual act, as if the soul were not infinite in its complexities.

However, this very act reduced the arm of the priestess to dust.

She glanced at her arm with an impassive expression. Among the floating souls, the soul of Wendy flew toward the Unknown God's vessel.

She reached into the pure white soul of Wendy and took something out.

"Evolve should buy me a few seconds."

This was the role Wendy had to play in his plan, a few seconds. That was all she was worth in the eyes of a god.

With the skill that allowed its user to evolve and adapt, the Unknown God bought the body of the priestess the time he needed.

The book in front of him flipped its pages as the souls around him began to swirl toward him in a chaotic cycle of multicolored lights.

He approached the dungeon gate, touching it with his palm as the vessel let out a soft crack.

...The dungeon gate began to change, turning pitch black from its edges.

The magic orbs recording the battle fell to the ground.

The cracking sounds grew louder, and then the Unknown God waved his hand one last time as all souls returned to the bodies they originally came from.

Slowly, he took a step. No one knew what he did, no one saw, no one could understand.

His soft footsteps echoed as he controlled the priestess's body like a marionette until he stopped in front of Lilith Astranova.

Looking at the flower in her hair, he smiled.

Her soul snapped back into her body as she regained the ability to move from where she stood still.

The emerald green of her eyes lifted toward the Unknown God, who was using the priestess as a vessel.

"Each petal creates a different world and a different outcome. Your chances end when the flower withers. This is merely an experiment, and your success will affect the overall outcome of my plans to obtain Bellum and Apotheon"

He glanced at the shaken young woman.

"I wish you the will to endure your nightmares... for it has only begun."

Before she could speak, the body of the priestess crumbled away, turning to dust. The ashes of her remains fell on Lilith as everyone's souls returned to their bodies.

Confusion, that was all Lilith felt. She did not understand anything; the why and the how were lost on her.

Why would the Unknown God do anything? She couldn't understand or comprehend it.

She touched the flower on her head, feeling a wave of dread wash over her.

Everyone looked around in confusion.

Sylvia's book returned to her, invisible to others.

Wendy's skill returned to her soul. For the first time, everything was calm, everyone was recovering from the shock of it all.

The magic orbs rose into the sky, hovering as if nothing had happened.

The world that had been frozen could move once more birds could fly, people could speak.

Everything was alright.

It should have been alright... until someone pointed to the dungeon gate.

The gate was slowly being consumed by darkness.

Evangeline's hands trembled, her legs shaking uncontrollably as she gazed at this familiar wrongness.

This horrible blackness, this wrongness was something she, no, they all recognized. It was the same kind of darkness that overflowed in the nights of Lysithara when someone ignited a light source.

Sylvia narrowed her gaze; her focus shifted slightly toward the gate.

She knew what this was all too well.

Leona subconsciously stepped back, as if afraid to provoke what that blackness represented.

Damon froze. He had just regained consciousness, sure he had won. He had defeated Amon, his shadow clone had dissolved after depleting his shadow energy.

Everything should have been well, yet...

Damon didn't even know what to feel. His heart was pounding, and his danger sense screamed at him, there was no escape.

This was no doubt the third act of his quest.

[Despair]

His hands trembled. He wasn't afraid to die, but he could lose more than his life here.

His friends... his loved ones... too much.

This darkness, he recognized it.

He spoke the words like a forbidden whisper.

"Nightmare."

The darkness spread, deeper and more terrifying than any shadow. This was the same darkness the outsider Ittorath was made of.

The same type of darkness from which dark creatures had descended to battle the ancient residents of Lysithara.

A nightmare created by the Unknown God.

"Hahahahahaha..." Damon laughed, but his laughter was hollow and bleak, filled with hopelessness.

Right, this was just the Unknown God's way. He acted personally to remind Damon that he could not escape from his chessboard.

Man purposes, The Unknown God disposes.

From the gate, something pitch black crawled out. It looked like a massive hand pushing forward, slowly pulling its body through the crack in reality.

The gate expanded like a woman's pelvis during childbirth birthing this monstrosity.

It stood tall easily one hundred meters with four immense arms, its body seeming to be made of hair, and a mouth gaping across its stomach.

Dark. Its form was a deep, devouring darkness, as if it had crawled out from the nightmare of a god.

Its aura was overpowering, divine and monstrous at once.

Yes it was divine.

This was a nightmare.

It reached with its giant hand and grabbed the nearest person. Their eyes turned pale white as their soul was consumed by the nightmare. Their corpse fell to the ground then slowly turned pitch black and rose again.

They all watched in horror.

No words or signals were exchanged.

Screams echoed out as everyone scrambled for safety.

They all understood one truth,

fighting was futile.

Chapter 734: Nightmare

Small... they were all so small. What did their little lives matter to an all-powerful god?

Damon watched as the blackness spread to another person, consuming them whole. He clenched his Dealer's Hand tightly, the weapon trembling with his grip.

He had slain countless nightmares before back when he'd gone insane in the dark depths of Lysithara, but this was different.

This was not a nightmare born from the fear or despair of a small entity. This was a god's nightmare.

Everyone stampeded to escape as the giant bent down, its massive palms sweeping through the crowd and grabbing hundreds of people as they screamed and fought to get away.

Hundreds of bodies were crushed together, their shrieks echoing like a choir of terror across the broken land.

Some tried to fight, others clung desperately to the nearest person, driven purely by instinct. A man struck back in panic, freeing himself for a fleeting moment, falling from the creature's grasp, only to realize too late that escape was an illusion.

The bodies that had fallen moments ago rose again, their eyes hollow and lifeless, now puppets of the nightmare's will. They reached out for him, dragging him into their collective darkness until his screams were silenced.

The nightmare shrieked into the sky, its voice a cacophony of despair that shook the heavens.

Damon could only watch. He knew escape was futile. His heart was heavy, pulled deeper into despair.

The unknown god was cruel, but there was always a twisted fairness in his cruelty.

"God would never throw a burden you can't overcome," Damon muttered bitterly, his voice trembling.

There had to be a way. In all this madness, in all this despair, there had to be one.

His eyes flashed toward the dungeon gate.

"The gate..." he whispered, then raised his voice, shouting over the chaos, "Head to the dungeon gate! We have to enter the World Dungeon!"

But no one listened. His words were lost to the screams. Everyone was too consumed by fear, too lost in the chaos. The dungeon gate stood near the nightmare itself running to it meant running toward the danger, not away from it.

Watson, who was close by, slowed his pace. Biting his lip hard, he shouted, "We have to go back, enter the dungeon!"

He turned, but what he saw froze him completely. Anyone who had dared to hesitate, anyone who had turned back, saw the impossible.

The giant nightmare reached out with its enormous arms and grabbed the spatial rift that was the dungeon gate.

The world itself screamed as reality began to tear. The gate cracked and twisted violently, the sound like the universe being ripped apart.

"Reeeeeiiiiiiiiitttttttt!!!" the nightmare shrieked, pulling with an otherworldly strength.

It wasn't a physical structure, it was a rift in space, a dimensional tear, yet this creature ripped it out as though it were nothing more than cloth.

Lifting the spatial rift high like a mace, the nightmare brought it down.

The ground split open, the air trembled, and hundreds were swallowed by the blackness as their screams faded into silence.

But that was not the end. The nightmare's body began to swell grotesquely, birthing clusters of writhing black spores. From them, dozens no, hundreds of smaller nightmares spilled out like a tide of crawling horrors.

Damon gritted his teeth, grabbing Waton's arm.

"Come on run!" he shouted, pulling him along as the wave of darkness chased after them, devouring all in its path.

He didn't know what to do. There was nothing he could do. This creature... it was beyond anything he had ever faced.

Stronger than Ittorath. Stronger than the Keeper of False Truths.

It was beyond the seventh class advancement.

In a single, casual act, the Unknown God had shown him the true difference between man and god. Against a god, the defiance of man meant nothing.

Abellona flew above him, her face pale and shaken.

"We have to get out of the combat zone," she shouted. "We just need to halt the tide! I can open a path, I need time!"

Damon clenched his jaw and nodded.

"Okay..."

He raised his hand, and hundreds of black swords materialized in the air before everyone, forming a barrier of shadow and magic. Taking a step forward, he teleported in front of the horde.

"We have to slow down the tide if we want to escape! buy time for the princess!" he roared, raising his sword high.

"Children of Aetherus! Demons! Goddess races! Fight with me!"

His voice thundered across the battlefield.

sure his words would be enough, he charged anyway.

Watson gritted his teeth and followed. Then Xander, Evangeline, and countless others surged behind him like a desperate tide, choosing to fight despair head-on.

Demons worked with their enemies against this common enemy.

Explosions rocked the battlefield, screams tore through the air.

Watson cried out as heads were torn from bodies, corpses piling like broken dolls. The nightmares seemed enraged by their defiance, growing even more vicious.

"Stop... stop time!" Watson begged helplessly, his voice breaking. But his plea fell on deaf ears. This was the act of a god.

Damon fought fiercely, flames roaring around him, blood dripping from his wounds as he cut through the endless tide.

Lilith battled too, ripping through the lesser nightmares with brutal precision. But in the chaos, a white beam of light shot toward her. She teleported instantly, eyes snapping toward the attacker.

"Sylvia Moonveil."

Sylvia stood amidst the carnage, her gaze cold and distant.

"I've been looking everywhere for you," she said softly. "It's time for payback."

Lilith narrowed her eyes.

"Are yah crazy? Is this really the time for a petty squabble?"

"Better late than never. I'll see you in hell."

Lilith gritted her teeth.

"How about I send you there."

Their battle erupted amidst the chaos, their spells colliding while nightmares swarmed around them.

Waton watched all of it, the dying, the chaos, the desperation. He turned his gaze to Abellona, who was using everything she had to open a way out.

"Hah... my first battle was also a failure..." he whispered bitterly, walking toward Damon, who was still cutting down monsters like a storm of fire and shadows.

He reached out and placed a hand on Damon's shoulder.

Damon spun around, blade ready, only to stop when he saw Waton's face. The young man was smiling.

"I'll handle this," Waton said quietly. "I can buy you time."

Damon's eyes widened. "Waton, what are you—"

"I never told you what my third class skill was, did I?" Waton raised his trembling hand. "I always wanted to stop time... my third skill is called Last Hourglass."

His body began to wither, aging rapidly before Damon's eyes. Youth faded into wrinkles, strength into frailty. In moments, he looked like an old man.

His cracked voice whispered, "Stop time."

The world froze. Every nightmare stopped mid-motion.

Waton's body fell backward, but Damon caught him. His hands trembled; his heart ached as though something was breaking inside him.

"Waton... why... I promised you wouldn't die..."

The old man's withered hand touched Damon's cheek.

"I know, I stopped time... I was always afraid to use it... Damon, is this... a great accomplishment?" His voice shook as tears welled in his aged eyes.

"Will my father... be proud?"

Damon nodded firmly, even as his throat tightened.

"Yes. He would be."

Watson smiled softly and closed his eyes.

Damon gritted his teeth, lifting his body in his arms. He refused to let him be left behind.

But the giant took a single step and instantly closed the distance.

Its foot came crashing down, crushing Abellona beneath it. The princess vanished into the blackness.
Damon's breath froze.

Then, with a sweeping motion of the black dungeon gate, the nightmare consumed everything in its path.

"Leona!!!" Damon screamed her name but she was gone.

"Matia, return to me!" he shouted, recalling his knight into the safety of his shadow.

Tears blurred his vision as he saw Evangeline swallowed by the dark.

Then Xander holding onto Emilia Highgon fell next, both devoured by the nightmare's tide.

"Xander..." Damon whispered weakly.

One by one, everyone was consumed.

At the other end of the battlefield, Lilith and Sylvia continued their duel, oblivious to the world collapsing around them.

Damon placed Waton's corpse into his shadow storage, then dashed toward them, but before he could reach them, the black gate fell upon their location. When the dust settled, only two frozen nightmares remained.

All around him, familiar presences vanished. His knees gave out. The world was silent.

Everyone was gone.

The barely functioning magic orbs captured it all the last man standing in a battlefield of despair and nightmares.

"Ahhh..." He gasped for air, clutching his chest as his Seed of Depravity grew, spreading through his veins like poison.

"Ahhhh!!!" he screamed, slashing wildly at the nightmares, his voice breaking as his strikes became frantic.

But no matter how many he cut down, their numbers never lessened. The giant simply watched him, indifferent and unmoved.

"This... this can't be real..."

A nightmare struck him with a mace, another impaled him with a sword then another, and another until his body was pierced by countless blades.

Still, he raised his trembling hands, stopping Matia from emerging to save him.

His flesh peeled, his body breaking apart.

"Heh... ahahahaha..." Damon laughed weakly, hollowly.

"I lost..."

As his body crumbled to ash, the giant reached out and closed its hand over him.

The darkness swallowed him whole.

Then, a faint chime echoed.

[You are now dreaming the Nightmare of Lazarak.]

[Quest Complete.]

[End Of Vol 5]

[Author Note]

Can't believe we actually finished another volume.

For lack of a better name, I'll call it the War Games arc.

For everyone who's been reading this far... I've got some bad news, I'm dropping this novel to focus on real life.

...Just kidding.

You guys know I'm too stubborn to quit now. I'm dedicated to seeing this story through to the very end, no matter how long it takes.

Arc Five was a wild ride for Damon. He did whatever he wanted, lived freely, and for a moment, he was happy. But happiness never lasts forever, and Damon still has his ultimate goal—to die.

Maybe the Unknown God didn't like that idea and decided to wipe out everyone instead. Who knows?

What we do know is that this story isn't over. Not even close.

The next arc is going to be one hell of a ride for Damon, and I hope to see you all there.

— Renegadex

Leave a review and tell me what you think. It really helps.

Chapter 735: A Tale Forgotten

"A god is only truly dead when they are forgotten."

"I want to be remembered."

That was the last wish of someone who perished torn to pieces, abandoned, and erased from every memory.

Everyone had forgotten him.

But a certain god had not.

"You will be remembered... I promise," the mysterious god whispered.

Carved somewhere unseen and forsaken, in a place no one recalls, from a time long forgotten—

Thus began the first words:

"Before there was light, there was darkness."

"Before there was peace, there was war."

"Before there was Aetherus, there was Lazarak."

This entity was darkness itself pure, endless, and tranquil. Yet not long after his birth, a glow bloomed in the void, faint and trembling, until it grew brighter, burning away the serenity he once embodied.

It was blinding, alive with emotions he could never understand.

From that light came life.

And from life came war.

"Long before the First Epoch.

Before the rise of demonkind.

Before the Goddess carved laws into light—"

"Someone rebelled. And as a result, he was broken, and free magic was stripped from the world."

Stripped of his divine essence, he was cast away into a hidden realm as punishment—

before the world itself had even fully formed.

"There was a minor world god, whose name was whispered and insignificant."

"Lazarak, the god of darkness and serenity."

"He was born in silence, and walked without worshippers."

In a world that adored glory and radiance, what need was there for peace born from darkness?

Who would kneel for a god who offered calm instead of conquest?

None.

The world of Aetherus, bound to the Pillar of Conflict, rejected Lazarak.

While other gods fed on hymns of triumph and chants of war, he stood apart—

watching the faithful slaughter one another, their prayers drowned beneath the cries of the dying.

A dark figure watched from his silent domain as mortals built monuments to destruction—

their knowledge sharpened into weapons, their genius reduced to murder.

He shed tears for every soul lost. A thousand tears for every drop of blood.

"Their devotion burned on the altars of conquest."

"His fellow gods fell with each pointless war.

This world was not allowed to have peace."

Overcome by anguish, he understood, his tears could not save them.

For every life he preserved, thousands more perished.

So he rebelled.

It was a starless night when a radiant figure brought Lazarak to his knees.

"You are weak, brother," the radiant one said coldly. "That is why you rebel. You surround yourself with those like you failures."

The radiant god turned toward the heavens as a transcendent force ripped something vital from the world.

His eyes trembled with sorrow. "This is the consequence of your actions. We must all pay... but you, most of all."

The dark god only smiled, broken and resigned.

"I regret that I failed. I regret that I am weak. I curse the cruelty of our creator... and the heartlessness of our mother."

His rebellion had cost creation its true names.

Thus, he was sealed and forgotten cast into oblivion.

He was powerless.

He was nothing.

But in his nothingness, Lazarak did what no god dared.

From his tears he forged a well—

a pool clear as glass, born from sorrow itself.

His will refused to fade.

From that well, he reached beyond existence, calling into the infinite metaverse beyond.

And Lazarak failed.

In a realm of endless horror, the god of darkness was torn apart, his voice echoing endlessly into the void.

"The horrors that lurked beyond were beyond him."

Until—

The eyes of the broken god ceased weeping.

Through the infinite expanse, his mind brushed against something vast, so vast that even creation itself seemed to hold its breath.

"In that silence, he found something... a presence so immense it made eternity tremble."

The Unknown God.

No temples bore His name.

No prayers had ever reached Him.

But Lazarak reached first—

and the abyss answered.

The god of peace had done the unthinkable.

Hidden within his darkness, he built a tomb for gods.

He gathered forbidden power in secret.

And with it, he committed the ultimate sin.

He brought Aetherus to the attention of something that should never have noticed it.

In that void, Lazarak trembled, clutching his head in terror.

"I know not what this will bring... I carry this sin alone. All who suffer from my choice, I beg your forgiveness."

And in doing so,

he was marked for death.

The other gods called him heretic.

Aetherus itself branded him traitor.

They tore his divine body apart,

and buried his name beneath the world.

But Lazarak's spirit did not fade.

He burned his own soul,

became a beacon,

and cried out into the heavens—

Not for himself, but for Aetherus.

For all who lived within it.

He pleaded for the end of Conflict.

He raised his hand to the sky, his divine blood burning away as the gods descended upon him.

His cry pierced through the chaos.

And then, Lazarak was gone.

Only the echo of his suffering remained—

soaked into the soil of a world that had erased him.

In that moment, the Unknown God understood.

And He took His first step.

Aetherus rejected Him.

The world resisted His presence.

But still, His influence leaked through—

not enough to descend,

not enough to save Lazarak—

but enough to leave a scar.

"The Deep Abyss."

On an unnamed continent, a great pit spiraled into existence—

the last remains of Lazarak, dripping with divine residue.

Through it, the aura of another god seeped through.

"A flaw in Aetherus."

The world cracked once more.

War returned.

Lesser gods shattered and died; those who survived fell into sleep.

The sky bled with light as the remnants of divinity screamed, devoured by the forming tomb.

The tomb consumed them all and disappeared.

Even Aetherus itself fell into slumber, unable to contain the chaos.

And the Goddess, in her wrath, faced the invading Unknown God.

Their battle was beyond comprehension

colors ceased to exist, concepts unraveled, and stars themselves were erased.

"She erased His name from the minds of all creation."

"The God of Names despised His own, and so He cast it away."

He became The Unknown God.

Not forgotten merely by tongue,

but erased from memory itself.

He would remain only as a symbol—

a mystery.

A heresy.

A silver-haired god wearing a mask that covered half his face looked upon a formless woman draped in black, her veiled visage solemn, her presence heavy with mourning.

"Time travel is such a hassle," he said with a faint smile. "I'll see you in a few hundred thousand years, Minerva."

And the god vanished.

Yet in the shadows of Aetherus, his influence endured—

subtle, patient, and ever-spreading toward his unseen purpose.

"But what they truly destroyed," whispered the voice,

"was the only god who never wanted to be worshipped."

A god who prayed for peace.

And so the Zero Epoch ended—

not with victory,

but with a silent, forgotten beginning.

A story that would one day awaken again.

"Victory is an endless nightmare.

Defeat is the moment of wake."

"I pray your nightmares end."

Chapter 736: Can You Keep It Down

[You are dreaming the Nightmare of Lazarak.]

[You have leveled up.]

[You have received the skill: Shadow Siezer.]

[You have received Primordial Shadow Essence.]

[You are alive.]

Damon felt a strange ache spread through what was left of him. Pain racked every fragment of his being heavy, dull, and endless. It wasn't just physical; it was the kind of agony that dug into the very essence of his soul.

The world around him felt different, alien. He tried instinctively to draw breath through lungs that no longer answered his will only to realize, with a creeping horror, that he couldn't breathe.

He froze. Then, a faint thought.

Well, that was no issue...

I must have gotten severe lung damage...

Even as he thought it, pain surged again raw, merciless. He couldn't move. His body or whatever was left of it felt foreign. Memories flickered like dying embers in his mind: the final battle, the chaos, the desperate faces of his allies. A single moment that was all it took for everything to be lost.

Everyone he had cared about... gone.

"It... hurts..."

His voice trembled. His heart throbbed with a pain deeper than wounds, a thousand invisible needles piercing straight through it.

Faces surfaced in his mind only to shatter and fade into darkness. All his friends, all the people he had fought beside, vanished into nothing.

He was back where he had started.

Alone. Once again.

"The powers of a god are absolute... I now see how small I am... how little my defiance matters..."

His heart filled with venomous bitterness.

"But so what... so what... god or man... it's all the same! I already knew I was going to lose anyway... this defeat means nothing, you bastard... I am... I..."

He couldn't even finish. The anger and grief caught in his throat, choking him, silencing his rage.

Damon tried to lift his hand to his face, but froze mid-motion.

Something was wrong.

He didn't have hands.

Not that they were cut off, they simply didn't exist.

"W...wher... Where am I?"

It was the first time he truly looked around. Darkness stretched endlessly, swallowing everything. In one direction, enormous chains extended into the void, their ends lost beyond sight. Smaller chains hung loosely nearby, reaching toward him like metallic serpents.

Except... they weren't tied to his body.

Or rather, he realized grimly, he didn't have a body.

"My... my body..."

He stared down at himself or what replaced him. His form was gone, replaced by a writhing mass of shadowy flame resting upon a wide stone altar. The very core of his being pulsed as a pitch-black heart of shadows, and circling above it was a faintly glowing crown, floating like a halo.

He knew that crown. It was his, the Pale Crown.

His body was gone. His heart remained. A heart of shadows, the totality of his existence.

"My... body's been destroyed..."

A faint, bitter chuckle escaped him.

"I really should have been dead... huh."

The only reason he still existed was his skill Deathless. His heart of shadows must have kept his consciousness intact. That, and his Shadow Reconstruction, the ability to recreate a body so long as his shadow-heart endured.

He cast his gaze around once more. The place was vast, an ancient mausoleum or temple carved of stone and darkness. Towering pillars stretched upward, their surfaces etched with unreadable sigils.

Weathered murals and cracked statues lined the walls, silent witnesses to something long forgotten.

But most of all, he felt it, a deep, oppressive magic saturating the air, connecting the chains to his shadow like bindings to a prisoner.

Still, something else unsettled him more than anything, the darkness. It wasn't just absence of light; it was a living void, one his perception couldn't pierce.

And from that void, at the farthest edge of the ceiling, hung a massive cocoon, woven like the nest of some monstrous insect, its interior pulsating faintly as if eager to give birth.

Damon's gaze hardened. He analyzed, assessed. He hated that his mind was calm, as if watching himself from afar. He realized the cause instantly.

His skill [Remorseless] had activated.

It dulled his pain, granting him a fleeting sense of relief but also robbed him of the warmth of grief.

Everyone is really gone... consumed by nightmares...

Time blurred. He didn't know how long he'd stayed like that. Seconds? Hours? Days? His thoughts looped endlessly as he relived every memory again and again.

If he still had eyes, he would have cried.

But he had no body to shed tears.

Damon had always been strong enough to pretend he was fine, even when he wasn't.

He'd always hidden his pain behind a calm mask. But at least, before, he could feel human.

Now, he wasn't sure what he was anymore.

Perhaps that was why he felt so mad.

He began whispering names, one after another, the people he had lost.

"Lilith, Sylvia, Xander, Leona, Waton, Wendy, Abellona..."

He repeated them endlessly. Hours, days, maybe weeks, the words became a mantra of mourning.

"Damn you. Damn you, Unknown... you'll pay for this... bastard..."

He alternated between fury and despair. Between curses and self-loathing.

"I'm such a fool... I should have seen this coming... this is all my fault... I deserve all the suffering I go through..."

The cycle continued — rage, guilt, resentment and self loathing.

But even he knew this couldn't go on.

He bit down or at least, felt like he did forcing himself to stop. He couldn't allow his mind to spiral into insanity. Yet, ironically, his Pale Crown made that impossible.

It prevented madness. It preserved his sanity.

And that, he realized, was the cruelest curse of all.

Insanity would have been mercy.

Sanity was eternal torment.

With effort, he turned his perception inward, opening his system panel. The notifications glimmered faintly in the darkness.

He had leveled up.

A new skill, Shadow Siezer was added to his skills.

And then, one more line that caught his eye one that sent a spark of hope through the emptiness.

[Primordial Shadow Essence]

Right. He hadn't lost everything.

"Matia," he whispered softly.

His companion, his shadow, had hidden in his shadow during the chaos. She had to be alive.

He reached into his own dark form, his senses brushing through the writhing flames of shadow. There faint, fragile, but present he felt her aura.

Matia was still here.

Still alive.

And that was enough to make his shadow-heart thrum violently with emotion.

He tried to summon her to pull her free but the chains around him rattled violently, tightening with a metallic scream. Pain surged through his entire being.

"Ahh—"

"What..."

He tried again, forcing against the restraints, but all he achieved was more agony.

"What are these things..." he groaned, irritation seeping into his tone.

He refused to yield. His shadow ignited in violent defiance, the Flames of Ashborn roaring from his form as the chains trembled under the pressure.

And then—

"Can you keep it down..." a voice spoke from the darkness.

Damon froze. The sound was soft, echoing almost casual. He spread his shadow perception outward instantly, but found nothing.

"Who... who said that... or... have I gone mad again..."

"Again? You've gone mad before? Sorry to hear that..." the voice replied dryly.

Damon's crown pulsed faintly above him. He couldn't be hallucinating, the crown suppressed madness. Though, could he really say he was wearing it when it just hovered over his disembodied heart?

"Who are you..."

The voice was silent for a long moment. Then, with a hint of amusement, it spoke again.

"Oh, me? My, where are my manners? I've been locked in here so long I forgot how to introduce myself..."

A pause followed, long enough to make Damon's shadow flicker uneasily.

"I am Lazarak."

Chapter 737: Lives Under A Rock

Lazarak... hmmm, that was a name Damon had heard before. It came from a key he had taken from Chrome after killing the professor.

After killing him, Damon had discovered a hidden space that could only be accessed using that very key.

The key of Lazarak.

"Lazarak..." Damon muttered softly, more confused than ever.

His most recent system prompt still echoed in his mind: You are dreaming the Nightmare of Lazarak.

"A nightmare..." he whispered under his breath.

"Did you say something... you strange, ugly, formless creature?" Lazarak replied to his words, his tone uncertain, hesitant unsure what to even call the thing before him.

Damon's current form was anything but ordinary; he had no body, no limbs, only a single beating heart and a crown of flickering light.

The rest of him was a mass of burning shadows, constantly shifting, whispering like smoke trying to take shape.

"What a weirdo."

Damon ignored him, his attention drawn instead to the word nightmare. A dream... a horrible dream.

Wasn't his entire life already a nightmare? Still, despair aside, he had a faint recollection something buried deep in his mind. A nightmare he once experienced but couldn't recall.

It was in Lysithara, when he had uncovered something tied to the Unknown God and the Pillar.

For that curiosity, the goddess herself erased him, and even the other True Beings had acted to remove him. One of them almost succeeded or maybe they did and only the Unknown God's intervention had saved him.

'I dreamt the nightmare of the Unknown God.'

The memory surfaced like a painful scar. Afterwards, Damon woke up alive but with a hollow ache in his heart. Every time he tried to remember that dream, tears would fall from his eyes without understanding why.

"Is this place real?" Damon muttered, his voice echoing through the void.

"I really hate to be the bearer of bad news," Lazarak replied lightly, "I understand it's your first time in prison... but don't worry, after a few thousand years of crippling loneliness, you get used to it."

His tone was casual, almost teasing as though loneliness and madness were natural companions here.

"This is a nightmare," Damon murmured to himself, watching the shadows around him flicker.

"I know... it's horrible," Lazarak sighed. "You'd think my brother would at least put some illumination here. Ahh, he's horrible... could've at least left me some comfort."

Damon wanted to frown, but he didn't have a face. His existence now was reduced to a hovering heart surrounded by spectral black flames.

"Who... or rather, what are you?"

His voice carried suspicion. This overly friendly voice in the dark couldn't be trusted but wherever this place was, this entity called Lazarak might know something.

Still, Damon's heart pulsed harder, faster. He couldn't just sit here and despair. His friends might be trapped in similar nightmares.

"...I am Lazarak. Didn't I introduce myself or did I forget?" he replied dryly.

Damon's flames flared in irritation.

"You already said that. I'm asking what you are. Am I supposed to know you? You're saying your name as if that's supposed to matter."

The darkness fell silent, thick and impenetrable even to Damon's eyes.

"Hmm... you truly do not know of my existence..."

The voice trembled slightly, the casual tone gone, replaced by a solemn stillness that filled every inch of the void.

"Has the world forgotten me in a thousand years...? Has my brother forgotten me?"

Lazarak's tone was mournful, his words heavy with loss as though being forgotten was the worst fate imaginable. Then, he laughed.

"Very well, so be it..."

Damon felt the shift an ancient, melancholic gaze settling upon him. The feeling was immense, ancient, older even than Aetherus, yet strangely without hostility.

"I am Lazarak, god of darkness, peace, and serenity... may I have your name?"

Damon's suspicion only deepened at the phrasing.

"You cannot have my name... but you may call me Damon."

"Huh? Have your name? I'm not a fae stealing people's names is just rude." Lazarak sounded genuinely offended.

Damon blinked metaphorically.

"Huh? Steal? Fae don't steal people's names."

Lazarak's tone shifted into one of disbelief. It was as if Damon had just said the sky wasn't real.

"Of all the species the goddess created, the fae are the worst. Shameless little scoundrels, always tricking people and stealing their names."

"Are we... talking about the same fae? Wait did they stop? Hmm, I guess my lessons on morality finally paid off. Thank goodness. Now I can focus on those shameless little leprechauns instead."

Damon said nothing, letting Lazarak ramble. He had never heard of fae being able to steal names. It wasn't recorded in any scripture, archive, or legend.

"Lazarak... if I may ask, why are you here?"

That question made the darkness pause. Damon felt it recoil slightly, as though the void itself had drawn back.

"Hmmm, I see. I understand... They didn't teach you about the past. Well, it's no big deal."

There was a hint of bitterness beneath his calm.

"You know how the lesser gods led different races to fight wars for dominance and other nonsense like that?"

Lazarak spoke casually, as if Damon should already know this. But Damon had never met a lesser god in person. He'd only seen their abandoned shrines and cracked idols most had been forgotten, replaced by worship of the goddess alone.

"No. I don't know."

"Hmm." Lazarak didn't sound annoyed. If anything, he seemed thoughtful piecing together something quietly.

"Tell you what, you strangely ug— I mean, not bad-looking creature... Let's try this. I'll tell you my story, and you tell me yours."

Damon's shadows flared faintly. Lazarak had almost called him ugly.

'I'm handsome, dammit,' Damon thought bitterly. Narrow-minded as always, even now.

Lazarak cleared his throat, an oddly human gesture for a disembodied formless god.

"I'm sure you're aware... not long ago, I, Lazarak, the god of peace, rebelled. Using magic, I tried to change the natural order of things..."

He paused, as if expecting some recognition.

"Still have no idea what you're talking about," Damon replied flatly.

"The rock you live under must be far, far away... poor creature."

"Just continue your tale," Damon said, dismissive but calm.

Chapter 738: Eidolon

"This world has a dire secret... you see, this secret drove us all to war. Even I, the god of peace, was not spared."

Lazarak's voice carried softly through the darkness, echoing in the unseen void around Damon.

"I was there when the first mortal was carved from the mud... I was there when they built their first huts... when they gathered and formed tribes."

He sounded almost wistful like an ancient being reminiscing over the birth of creation.

"Admittedly, I was there when the other lesser gods were born. There was so much life then everything was thriving."

Then his tone shifted, turning cold, shadowed by something darker.

"But petty disputes became violence. And I was there when the first mortal life was taken by another."

Even without seeing his face, Damon could feel the weight of Lazarak's sorrow. The air itself felt heavier, burdened by memories older than time.

"I watched as tribes shattered over the smallest differences. A difference in birth became a reason to divide; separation gave birth to fear... and fear gave birth to hate. And that... that gave birth to war."

"Peace was murdered by man."

His voice trembled slightly, bitterness cutting through every word.

"I hoped the other gods would intervene to stop the madness but they didn't. They merely chose sides, and the wars spread. What was once beautiful was drowned in flames. Mortals innovated only to kill each other more efficiently."

The once serene tone of Lazarak grew darker, still heavy mournful.

"For thousands of years I tried. I tried dialogue, peace, reason, love... forgiveness. Nothing lasted. Peace was fleeting. War was eternal."

Damon could almost see it as an endless battlefield stretching across the world itself, gods fighting alongside their followers

"I understood my place," Lazarak continued, voice cracking with pain.

"I was peace only before the next war. A calm before the storm. A half forgotten god, in a world where an eye for an eye had made all blind."

Damon's thoughts flickered. The tomb of the lesser gods... so it really was him.

This was long before the demon race, before Ascroft or Lysithara before the world had even taken its first steps in the Zero Epoch.

Lazarak's anger returned, faintly trembling through the darkness.

"So, I did what I had to. I used magic. I created something grand, a magic that could end the cycle. But they turned against me... and it didn't matter. The weak god they had forgotten would make them remember. I would bring peace... through their own violent means."

"Let me guess," Damon replied dryly, "you failed."

"No... not quite. I succeeded and failed all the same. The Goddess intervened and gave my brother the power to overcome my creation."

The darkness receded a little, pulsing softly with melancholy.

"I was imprisoned. And now, the world suffers with me. No more magic that exceeds a single attribute."

Damon inhaled sharply. That was because of him? He had always thought it was because of the Unknown God.

"Wait... what about the Unknown?" he muttered.

"Unknown?" Lazarak repeated, genuinely confused. "What's that?"

Damon froze. The realization hit him like lightning. He doesn't know. Then this... this is the past before the tomb, before everything.

Lazarak's voice deepened.

"I am not done. I see my mistakes now. Peace cannot be begged for, it must be won. I cannot overcome my creator, but I will find one who can. I will find someone to save my children. I swear it, to whatever entity still lingers beyond the heavens."

Damon's heart pounded. So this is where it all began... the first spark of rebellion.

This is the Nightmare of Lazarak.

He clenched his burning essence tighter.

'If this is the past, then maybe I can change the future... maybe I can save them all.'

Lazarak's voice returned, faintly hopeful.

"Let's do this together. We have so much work to do, friend. Let us escape this prison."

Damon paused. "...We? Who's we?"

Lazarak seemed genuinely puzzled. "You're here, aren't you? At this depth? You're an enemy of the Goddess too."

"Fine," Damon said cautiously, "but who said I agreed?"

"Good luck figuring out how to escape alone then."

Damon hesitated... then let out a soft laugh.

"You didn't let me finish. Saying 'we' is a bit rude. We're practically one here. I prefer us."

Lazarak stirred, his dark form rippling approvingly.

"Good, good. I knew I liked you, creature. Even if you're a little ugly, a god can still love you."

Damon's flames flared violently. "I'm not ugly."

"Sure you're not," Lazarak teased lightly. "Now... how do we escape?"

Damon asked coldly, "You tell me."

Lazarak paused. "I dunno."

"...What?" Damon's voice trembled with disbelief.

"You just said let's escape this prison!"

"Yes," Lazarak replied, tone casual, "but I didn't say I knew how. You're putting words in my mouth which, I'll have you know, is very misleading."

"You're misleading!" Damon roared. "I thought you had a way out!"

"If I had a way out," Lazarak shot back, indignant, "I wouldn't still be here! It's called a prison for a reason, you know! You can't just stroll out!"

"I know what a prison is!" Damon hissed.

Lazarak sighed deeply, his voice shifting to calm. "Alright, enough disagreeing. Let there be peace."

Instantly, Damon's anger melted away. His thoughts went calm, his heart strangely serene as if his rage had been forcibly dissolved. Then the feeling faded, and his emotions returned to normal, though tempered.

He took a moment, then said evenly, "Fine. Let's start from the beginning. If we're going to escape, we need to know where we are."

"Oh, that's easy," Lazarak said cheerfully. "We are in the lower realm, under the protection of Seraph Null."

"I have no idea who that is," Damon replied flatly.

"He's a lesser god, but that's not the point. We're in a prison within his realm. A place meant for the worst of the worst. Only the vilest are sent here. And we..." Lazarak's tone turned grim, "...are at the deepest level."

The darkness pulsed once, like a heartbeat in the dark.

"Welcome," Lazarak said at last, "to Eidolon — the Imaginary Prison."

Chapter 739: Repeated Clues

Damon had almost forgotten or rather, it had slipped his mind Lazarak was a god. A god who had built a tomb.

The tomb of lesser gods.

But then... why was he imprisoned here, in this place called Eidolon?

His confusion was warranted. Damon could have made guesses if he wanted, but that was pointless. One thing he had learned from Lysithara was simple half-complete knowledge was more dangerous than no knowledge at all.

Lazarak had explained, but Damon felt there was more to all this.

"How do we get out?" Damon asked quietly. "You've spent a long time here. You must have found a clue."

The darkness went silent for a long moment. Then Lazarak's voice came, low and thoughtful.

"I know a bit... this place is an imaginary place, which means it exists but doesn't. The stronger you are, the more physically you can exist here. But as time passes, this place begins to distort you... it eats away at you."

Damon's shadow form flickered faintly. What Lazarak said was true, he could feel it.

He was losing shadow energy fast. But strangely enough, he was also regaining it almost as quickly. The place was suffused with darkness, and because of that, his Heart of Shadow allowed him to recover just as much as he lost.

A perfect, vicious circle.

Still, that meant he couldn't reconstruct a physical body here.

'I need flesh...' he realized grimly. 'To restore myself, I'll have to devour flesh again.'

Lazarak, oblivious to Damon's dark thought, kept talking.

"We can't interact with others outside, and others can't interact with us. This place is truly insidious, I've got to hand it to its creators."

His tone was oddly dry, almost playful.

"The higher the levels, the less substance the prisoners have. Some of them have devolved completely, at the highest levels, all that remains are emotions and memories."

Damon's heart pulsed slowly, hovering in silence as he listened.

"Then escape should be easy," he said. "If we manage to reach the top."

"Hahaha! Ahh, you're so optimistic," Lazarak chuckled.

"I wish it were that simple. But those emotions and desires? They've become something else. Each one tries to consume whoever enters or leaves."

Damon was still processing that when another thought struck him.

"But you're a god," he said.

"You should at least be seventh class, right? Wouldn't you be able to destroy them easily?"

Lazarak laughed again, his voice echoing faintly through the void.

"I wish it were that easy. But this is a lower realm. The strongest entity here is limited by the rank limit of the world. I can't exceed it. That's assuming I even recover the power I've lost after sitting here for so long."

Damon felt a headache forming impressively, considering he didn't have a body.

"So, you're a god with no godly powers," he muttered. "Useless."

Lazarak made a clicking sound, clearly displeased.

"I—I have godly powers! I mean, I could fight Seraph Null if the world was on the brink of collapse! But the laws here are fragile yet harsh on outsiders... destroying the core of what keeps this world stable would bring it down entirely."

"No laws mean I can act freely."

Damon's flames flickered. That might actually be an option... if we want to escape.

"Where... or what... would that be?"

Lazarak's tone dropped to a near whisper, as if afraid of his own words.

"That, obviously, isn't it. When a god dies... the world dies with them."

Damon would have narrowed his eyes if he had any. He understood what Lazarak was implying.

"You mean kill Seraph Null. But isn't that a paradox? You can only use your full power if the world collapses and the world won't collapse unless Seraph Null is dead."

Lazarak sneered, the darkness rippling faintly around him.

"Not necessarily. There are other options. I can invade his divine domain, spread my influence there, claim a piece of it for myself. Simply put, robbery."

Damon's heart gave a dark pulse. That sounds familiar...

Wasn't that exactly what the Unknown God had done to the Goddess of Doom?

He had invaded her creation through influence, through belief gaining strength even without a name.

In Aetherus, the demon continent was filled with his many followers, and even the free lands of the Sky Continent Vuldren allowed his name to be spoken despite Temple persecution.

"You want to start a faith," Damon said slowly. "Gain followers, then fight Seraph Null?"

"I'm not the expert in godhood," he added, "but will that even work? He has the advantage. This is his world."

Lazarak laughed, soft and oddly cheerful.

"I know it's crazy. We can't succeed in such a plan it's not feasible. Only a completely deranged god would attempt that. You'd need to be cunning, manipulative, and utterly mad."

Damon didn't respond immediately. The Unknown God had done it. And he had succeeded.

"Is it possible," Damon asked, "to kick a god out completely?"

The question made Lazarak pause.

"No. A god's domain can't be taken. Infiltrating one isn't feasible, at least on paper."

He hesitated, voice lowering.

"Except... Seraph Null and I share a similar source. And I am older. Technically. To pull this off, the invading god must share a strong connection with the god of the domain. They must, in some way, be one or similar."

Damon's flames flickered curiously.

"Like a husband and wife?" he asked. "Would that work?"

Lazarak seemed thrown by the question, but he answered anyway.

"Yes, that would work. Children and Siblings too or a shared creator, or source."

Damon's thoughts raced. Seraph Null aside... I have to know. He felt that uncontrollable itch again, that urge to ask.

"Would such a method work on the Goddess of Doom?"

Lazarak trembled. For the first time, Damon sensed genuine fear from him as though the thought itself bordered on insanity.

"No... I could never achieve such a feat," he said softly.

Damon pressed. "What if a god on her level did? One who shared that kind of connection with her?"

Lazarak fell silent. When he finally spoke, his tone was grave.

"Then it would work...perhaps."

For a moment, silence reigned. Then Lazarak gasped, realization dawning like lightning.

"It would work... it could work! Why didn't I think of that? She's absolute, yes but what happens when an unstoppable force meets an immovable object?"

His laughter echoed wildly through the darkness.

"Hah! You're a genius, Damon. Thank you. All I had to do was call something, someone that could deal with the Goddess!"

"I can still do this," he said, his voice trembling with conviction. "We can."

Then Damon felt it a strange pulse rippling through the dark, followed by the chime of his system.

[You have created an Inflection Point.]

His eyes widened in realization. This was his level-up condition.

[You have leveled up.]

[You have awakened Domination Fragment: Darkness Dominate.]

"Huh... wait, didn't he already say he was going to call someone to do his dirty work before?"

Damon glanced at Lazarak.

"Hey, you already mentioned that... why are you acting like it's my idea?"

Lazarak darkness laughed.

"Hehe, sorry... I forgot... but on the plus side, I'm glad you see it too."

"That's weird." Something felt off about Lazarak, or was it all in his head?

Chapter 740: I Am Going To Nag

This whole situation was weird. Why was Lazarak repeating himself, and why was Damon also suggesting the same thing considered an inflection point?

Damon wanted to sigh, but he couldn't. Right now, he had leveled up twice, and in doing so, gained a new skill.

The Shadow Seizer skill his most recent level-up had also granted him Darkness Dominate, a fragment belonging to his domination attribute.

[Darkness Dominate.]

He whispered the words softly, trying to take control of the darkness around him. For a moment, it stirred slowly rolling toward him, responding faintly to his will until...

"What are you doing..." Lazarak's voice cut through the gloom, halting the movement. The darkness froze, and Damon's shadow form flickered, then stilled completely.

Ignoring him, Damon focused inward, curiosity pricking at the edges of his mind as he inspected his new skill.

[Shadow Seizer]

[Description]

Her anger justified her sorrow, sacred.

What sin had she committed, save for being born beneath a Weeping Star, branded with the Bride of the Demon God attribute?

She never begged for that blighted gift, nor its cruel and unending boon.

Yet the old gods gazed upon her as a prize to claim—or a threat to erase.

These ancient, amoral deities, blind to mortal agony, could not fathom the weight of the torment they had sown.

And those who came bearing malice only deepened her despair.

Full of spite, she swore to seize her fate.

And to the author of her misery, the Unknown God,

she would repay in kind.

Years later, now a true god,

she faced the abyss only to find a mindless void.

The great enemy she had envisioned had not even been born.

There was nothing to seize—

only the shadow of what could've been.

[Effect]

A vile, insidious act of plundering the living shadow of your victims.

Take hostage the essence of what they are and hold their fates in yours.

[Type]

Active

[Cooldown]

5 secs

Damon paused. It had been a long time since the system had given such a detailed description one he could actually piece together.

The "her" in this description was obviously referring to the Goddess of Doom.

Damon knew that true gods were once mortals, which meant they must have been born like all mortals. The Weeping Star was often associated with the Unknown God. He was called The Weeping Star.

'The goddess, before she became a goddess, was likely born under The Weeping Star...'

Damon kept his thoughts to himself.

'Bride of the Demon God wasn't a title, it was an attribute.'

His flames flickered, his dark form stretching slightly as his mind processed the implication.

The old gods soon took an interest in her, but it was already established that these beings were amoral. Their understanding of mortals was twisted, acts of help could be more devastating than malice, and their cruelty was no less abominable.

The final part of the description hinted that after the goddess became a true god, she had wanted the Unknown God to answer for his injustice against her. Yet when she reached the abyss, she found only emptiness.

"The god who predated his own birth..."

Damon murmured, his tone almost reflective.

He couldn't help but feel a faint trace of sadness. To him, Doom was the enemy more so than the Unknown God but apart from killing him once, she hadn't truly acted against him since.

'Is Doom really the enemy? Or is she just another victim of that bastard?'

Then there was the Unknown, whose motives were as unclear as ever.

But wasn't this him speaking? Wasn't the Unknown the one who shared knowledge through the system panel?

Everything seemed suspicious.

Damon decided not to dwell on it for now. There were more immediate concerns like understanding the skill itself.

The skill allowed him to steal the shadows of others. A dangerous and potent ability. Damon knew that if a shadow was destroyed, its owner would die.

After distributing his new stat points, he began inspecting his current form in detail.

It was still his body or what remained of it damaged and stripped down to a heart and a crown. Chains dug deep into the shadows around him, merging into what was technically still part of his form.

Or what was left of it.

These chains prevented him from summoning Matia or even accessing his shadow storage. He was bound. Trapped.

"If only there was a way to break or disable these chains... even for a moment."

He muttered the words, not realizing how loud they echoed through the void until Lazarak responded.

"That would be difficult, but doable."

Lazarak's calm, detached voice resonated faintly through the darkness.

Damon's shadow flickered.

"How many minutes can you disable them for?"

Lazarak chuckled softly, a dry clicking sound that reverberated unnaturally.

"One second. No more. However..." He paused, his tone growing cautious.

"I won't do that. Those chains are our only way of escape. The mechanism that controls them lies on the floors above us."

His voice echoed faintly, weighted by centuries of waiting.

"If only we had someone who could reach there. Best to wait a few hundred years... let the chains corrode a little more."

Damon's form flickered violently.

"I understand your caution, but I can't wait a few hundred years. One second is more than enough for what I have in mind."

Lazarak sighed softly. The darkness stirred around Damon, shifting into vague, formless silhouettes that slithered beyond sight.

"Very well, then. I will trust you, friend. But if you fail, I'll nag you about this for the next few hundred years."

Damon's voice darkened with humor.

"I would be so traumatized... I'll have to succeed now, won't I?"

Lazarak laughed lightly, and with a rushing whoosh, the darkness spread upward. The sound of trembling metal followed the chains rattling violently as the shadows around them writhed.

Damon focused completely, his perception narrowing into his shadow storage, ready to pull out Matia, Ghost, and anything else he could summon.

Then, in that fleeting second, he felt one of the chains weaken its power faltering. In that instant, the crushing weight he hadn't realized was there lifted from him, and without hesitation, he reached deep into the shadows and pulled out everything he could.

The darkness spat out a storm of objects, food, potions, weapons, twisted bits of metal, and scraps of things long forgotten.

Lazarak watched with mild disappointment.

"...Ahhh, I knew it. I knew you would fail. I just knew it."

Damon scoffed as two distinct figures began to rise from the shadows, standing before his formless heart and crown on the altar.

Lazarak cleared his throat immediately.

"I never doubted you."