

## Shadow 801

### Chapter 801: Minion Formation

Damon felt winded by the magic arsenal spell on such a scale even in his own body it was a lot but this body seemed to be holding up even with its rank restricted to the fourth rank. It had a lot of mana so Damon was surprised to find that he still had mana. He pressed a hand to his chest as his breathing steadied, shoulders rising and falling with controlled focus.

"Well isn't that a pleasant surprise.."

Still they would recover and follow them so Lazarak smashed the tunnel entrance. Its fragments flew everywhere and the rubble blocked the ones outside. Dust rolled over them in a gritty wave as Lazarak lowered his arm from the strike.

He glanced at Damon..

"Now the hard part begins; it seems she's calling back all the stillborns in the tunnel network to her."

Damon closed his eyes and he listened to hundreds of moving entities in the walls all heading in one direction. His jaw tightened as he tilted his head, tracking the vibrations through the stone.

"Trying to beat us with numbers huh .."

He could play at that game....

Damon glanced at Matia, his expression sour. She merely nodded in acknowledgement, shifting her stance and tightening her grip on her weapon as frost gathered faintly around her boots.

"I'll protect your astral form..." she spoke coldly yet carried her usual confidence....

Damon nodded as he braced himself. The next moment the body of the mirror seraph collapsed to the ground as it continued its slumber under Lazarak authority. The vessel dropped like a puppet with its strings cut and Matia stepped forward instinctively to keep it from hitting the stone too hard.

His soul slipped out of the body, feeling a deep coldness in the air that tried to extinguish the flames of his life force. Damon steadied himself with a slow exhale even though he had no lungs, forcing his shape to stop flickering.

Lazarak glanced at him as Matia picked up the body of the mirror seraph which Damon had been wearing. She hoisted it across her shoulders with a grunt, shifting her weight so the armor would not drag.

'Are you sure it's a good idea to be roaming around as a soul when we are in a place where souls get eaten and absorbed by twisted giant humanoid infants with a ravenous taste for the astral form.'

Damon scoffed as he tried to steady his soul... his fingers curling reflexively as if clenching a fist.

"Thanks for reminding me of the obvious."

He muttered as a chilly void swept through his spine even though he didn't really have a spine anymore. He was just a soul after all, perhaps this was the same reason people still felt pain even when they had lost their limbs. His form shivered like rippling smoke.

Being used to having it there created a mental image of pain therefore pain was in fact just an illusion.

'Though getting kicked in the nut sack doesn't count'

Damon spread his shadow perception. Without a body to hinder him he could use some of his original skills to a lesser extent depending on the nature of the skill of course. His astral form expanded slightly, trailing a thin ripple along the tunnel floor as shadows bent around him.

How skills worked and differed from magic spells was a mystery of course and till this day no one had cracked it.

Nevertheless Damon's shadow perception worked, spreading all around him to the deepest shadows into the deepest layers of the tunnel. Damon began to brush the presence of shades, first ten, a hundred, soon thousands. The air stirred as if something cold and unseen was gathering around him.

At the same time he also noticed thousands upon thousands of stillborn heading to one particular tunnel leading to a deep cavern...

Damon sneered coldly. His astral face twisted in irritation.

The mother of stillbirth was not a very clever creature. She had just revealed her location by moving so many there but at the same time it was a better option since they could use Lazarak's sonar spell to find her.

Personally Damon would have fooled his enemies by amassing his troops in the opposite direction then lured them into a trap which may or may not sacrifice his own troops.

Well no matter. He was more focused on the shades and they sensed him too. They sensed the influence of the shadow control skill calling them, ordering these shadows to obey.

And with Damon's tyrannical half deranged will he ordered...

"obey.."

It was a simple command but Damon felt himself losing shadow energy, however it was less than he had expected. His soul flared slightly with the expenditure.

His power had grown considerably in a very short time. When he first took control of shades in Lysithara they used up too much shadow energy. Since then his power had grown several levels and two whole classes.

Controlling shades was now easy... easier than he remembered.

Like a necromancer which wasn't good since he couldn't be seen with this power if he still wanted to be in the good books of the temple.

Slowly the first of the shades reached Damon's side. Floating around him in a black ghostly form, its long hands seemed like they were made of shifting black smoke. The shade leaned toward him, its body bending unnaturally like liquid shadow seeking its master.

Lazarak watched with a small fascination. His eyes narrowed as the shade drifted close to Damon's form.

"Impressive. I did not think you were one of those outlaws who discarded life and made a mockery of death with the power... though your necromancy seems different."

Damon narrowed his eyes.. his aura flickering in annoyance.

No surprise Lazarak didn't like the idea of controlling dead souls. Must be his sensibilities as a god.

"I'm not a necromancer... I control shadows and unfortunately for shades they happen to fall under the broad definition of what a shadow is ...."

Damon frowned looking at the shades with a suspicious look... he reached a hand out, studying the texture of one drifting by him.

"Is it just me or does this shade look a little different... it looks more solid somehow .."

Lazarak didn't seem surprised.

"Yes, these shades are ancient. Don't forget only the worst of the worst are imprisoned here in Ediolon. The souls they were born from were truly atrocious..."

Damon nodded, feeling a chill around his soul as shades began to slowly gather. He grabbed one with his hand and just as he guessed he felt it get absorbed by his body as he heard a soft system chime.

[You have gained +10 shadow energy]

Sure enough his guess was right. His soul could absorb shadow energy even without a physical form. His astral fingers twitched as he felt the boost.

'Looks like I'll be rebuilding my body quicker than I anticipated.'

How fortuitous.

Damon called more and more shades until they formed a steady wall of shadows around his astral form, lifting it into the air as he commanded the shadows that made up their forms to wrap around him. The mass of darkness coiled and twisted obediently, almost forming an armor around him.

Lazarak watched him with a curious expression.

Damon smiled slowly, gaze cold.

"Let's go kill that thing.. inward my minions devour all in your path."

With those words a sea of black shades began moving towards the deep carven to face the mother of stillbirths and her stillborns. The ground trembled slightly under the unnatural surge.

Lazarak paused with a frown.

"Did you forget something... stillborns eat souls ..."

Damon paused, losing some of his thunder. His spectral shoulders sagged slightly.

"Tsk .... Why'd you gotta spoil my aura farming.."

Chapter 802: Kindness Is Cheap

A black tide of shades filled the tunnel as they forced their way into the deep cavern, their bodies sliding over stone and squeezing through cracks as they swarmed. They tore into the stillborns in coordinated bursts, clawed hands ripping and dragging the creatures down as they advanced.

Damon's astral form drifted among them like a ghost carried by a storm. He glanced toward Matia. She met his eyes and pulled out a staff, planting its base firmly into the ground in front of him.

He stepped forward. His astral form reached out, the faint outline of a hand brushing the shaft of the staff. The moment contact was made, the weapon responded. All the devastating power it had stored since the last time he used it surged outward through his soul.

The entire cavern shuddered. Dust rained from the ceiling. A deafening boom erupted as black destructive flames shot forward, rolling through the chamber like a tidal wave of annihilation.

The screams of the stillborn were swallowed by roaring blasts as the cavern walls cracked and collapsed inward. Rubble crashed down into the inferno, the flames licking across every surface and killing everything they touched.

[You have slain Stillborn]

[You have slain Stillborn]

...

[You have gained Charm: Womb of Healing]

The chimes echoed through the cavern as the destruction finally settled. Damon floated through the remnants of the blast, watching the black residue dissipate. He had even gained a charm, unsurprising since Ashborn had done most of the killing, granting him a massive collection of attribute points.

He looked at the scorched crater of what had once been the chamber.

"Hmmm. That was way better than I thought it'd be."

His calm voice carried over the ruins while his shades surged deeper into the cavern, slipping between shattered stone pillars and tearing apart the remaining stillborns.

The collapsed rubble sealed off the tunnels, trapping anyone outside and forcing the survivors inside to face the shades alone.

Which left only the Mother of Stillbirths.

"This was easier than I thought." Lazarak muttered from atop a fallen slab of ceiling, crouching to study the carnage beneath him.

Damon's gaze drifted toward the cavern's center.

"Yes. It seems after so much hardship, fortune has smiled on me again. Happens sometimes, I guess."

He walked past burned corpses, stepping neatly around the twitching ones still locked in combat with shades. Their limbs flailed helplessly as the shadows dragged them into darkness.

Lazarak kept pace beside him while Matia led the way. Damon saw no reason for his astral form to remain exposed, so he slipped back into the body of the Mirror Seraph with practiced ease.

His borrowed fingers closed around the sword's hilt. He rolled his shoulder once, testing the body, and continued walking. The nonchalance of the action made the possession seem more routine than putting on a coat.

As Damon neared the center of the cavern, his expression tightened. This one area remained untouched by flame.

The smell hit first, thick and rotten. It carried the stench of a birthing chamber left to rot for years, layered with old blood and spoiled fluids.

He lifted his head. Viscous sludge pooled across the floor. Weak, newly formed stillborns writhed in the muck, their tiny limbs spasming as they wailed. They looked like newborns only in the vaguest sense, hideously distorted and trembling.

Lazarak's face darkened. He extended his hand slowly.

"Sleep. It will be over soon."

The stillborns sagged instantly, their crushed cries fading into silence. Damon glanced at him.

"It would be easier to kill them, you know."

Lazarak nodded, voice quiet.

"I know, but it costs me nothing to be kind."

Damon sighed.

"Then kindness must be cheap."

He shifted his gaze to the deeper shadows ahead. Something was there. He felt her eyes before he saw her. The hostility pressing from those depths was thick and cold, hiding a sharp intelligence far beyond the simple stillborns.

"Come out. Your death is long overdue."

His voice echoed sharply across the cavern. Slowly, a shape pushed itself into view. Damon's lip curled as he took in her form.

A gigantic malformed fetus stood there, towering over them. Six arms hung from its swollen body. Pale skin stretched thin over bulging flesh, pink veins pulsing faintly.

Umbilical cords dangled like tendrils, dragging trails through the filth. Thousands of tiny eyes embedded in her flesh blinked moistly.

Each one carried a soul she had devoured, all of them crying with the wails of unseen infants. Mouths along her belly whispered broken prayers from mothers who had never heard their babies cry.

This was the Mother of Stillbirths.

Damon listened as the phantom voices of countless women rose around him. Each one prayed, begged, cried for their lost children.

"The gods are cruel. And if they are not, then they are too weak to do anything."

He muttered it absently. Lazarak lowered his head. He knew the truth of it. Lesser gods were selfish. Gods like himself who were kind were too weak to matter.

Damon hadn't said it to cut him. He had simply answered the voices, nothing more.

"You have killed my children. Why?" Her infantile voice cracked like a newborn trying to speak.

"They're ugly." Damon said calmly. Yes, he had killed them. No, it was not noble. But he had long stopped wasting guilt on things he chose to do.

He raised his sword.

"And you're next."

The Mother of Stillbirths trembled. Her fetus-like shell split open. Amniotic fluid spilled across the stone, and malformed stillborns plopped out, wailing as they slapped against the ground.

Damon felt a cold wave of disgust. This was not birth. It was a mockery of life as an idea, an abomination pretending to be creation.

"I know all children that are born. I do not know you." The Mother whispered, her flesh shivering. "You should not exist. You come to me, the Queen Mother, wearing flesh that is stolen."

Damon barely reacted. She was stalling. He could feel the stillborns trying to overwhelm the shades in the tunnels. It would not matter. He would kill her before they succeeded.

"Enough of your meager attempts at stalling. I'm not killing you for the greater good. You're ugly, so die."

Damon surged forward, sword sweeping in a brutal crescent as he struck at the Warden of the Fourth Trial.

### Chapter 803: Hollow Stillborn

Every trial demanded something different.

The first trial of self trapped you in a beautiful dream, a gentle illusion meant to swallow your will and never let go. It left you without any doubt or pain. This trial was meant to render you unwilling to fight against what you yourself desired most.

For Damon, it was peace. His mother, his home... he wished the nightmare that was his life had never happened.

On the fifth floor, where it unfolded, some of the most dangerous and vile entities were imprisoned.

To break free, Damon had killed himself within the dream. It had been an act of self, a rejection of the dream's comfort, rather than the murder of the illusion of his mother.

Though he still didn't know if she had been real.

By killing himself he had completed the trial.

Something the other prisoners had not done, the warden did not fight him; he simply let him leave.

The next was the trial of truth. Its prisoners were mindless things trapped in mirrors. Damon could not see them properly because, like him, they wandered an endless labyrinth of reflections, their identities stripped away, reduced to soulless husks. That trial forced you to face your truths. It was torment for liars. Damon had almost failed before Matia dragged him back to clarity.

She had made him admit his truths.

Following that ordeal came the trial of sin, which punished guilt rather than the act itself.

Its prisoners were bound as flesh-parchment books, forced to relive their sins endlessly. Damon endured the weight of his guilt until he refused to be chained by it any longer. Despite the pain, it had been the most liberating of all the trials.

He had always carried guilt, always hated who he had become to survive. Now he did not feel that way. His guilt would not guide him anymore.

Now came the current trial. The prisoners here had no bodies. Each one was a discarnate soul, some already twisted into shades. The warden, the Mother of Stillbirths, drowned her enemies beneath her countless stillborns until they died and became discarnate souls that fed her children.

This trial required no philosophical brilliance. Birth was the ultimate form of creation. The opposite of creation was destruction.

To pass, all you needed to do was kill the Mother of Stillbirths. Killing birth itself was the ultimate destruction. Her death was the only requirement.

Damon's blade carved into her soft flesh. The Mother shrieked, a high, wet cry.

Lazarak followed with a raised arm, forming a pillar of darkness that roared upward and shot toward the Mother of Stillbirths.

"This wasn't the plan Damon..." he shouted, knowing Damon had abandoned everything they discussed about how to fight her.

"Plans change."

Damon twisted aside as one of her umbilical cords lashed toward him, spraying fluid that hissed across the ground.

A spear of ice from Matia slammed into the Mother. She screamed, her voice thick with infant agony.

Damon shifted his weight to attack again when he sensed more and more shades dying.

"Matia, go back up the shades."

She dashed toward the rear without hesitation. The shades were being overrun as more stillborns crawled into existence, spilling slowly from every shadow.

Damon raised his hand, mana building hot and violent in his palm.

[Magic Gatling]

Thunder cracked through the cavern as streams of magic bullets erupted toward the monstrous fetus. The barrage tore stone apart, dust sweeping across the chamber in choking waves.

The Mother moved with disturbing speed. She stabbed her umbilical cords into piles of rubble and dragged her enormous body in sharp lunges, weaving with unnerving agility between the bullets as they carved through rock.

Lazarak slid beneath falling debris and manifested chains of darkness, sending them whipping toward her. She slapped them aside with her cords, sparks of dark energy scattering from each impact.

Her swollen body split open and a tiny stillborn wriggled free. It was hollow, even more lifeless than her deformed brood.

The moment it emerged, it floated toward Damon, who pursued the Mother with a relentless barrage of magic bullets.

He didn't hesitate. Damon raised his hand and fired thousands of bullets through the newborn's frail frame.

Even in death, it drifted toward him.

It had been born and killed in the same breath, its corpse drifting through the air, leaking blood and amniotic fluid as it floated closer. It reached inches from Damon, who was still tracking the Mother with his aim.

He did not have his usual senses in this body. No danger sense, no shadow form or skills. But instinct surged through him, carved into him by many of his near-death battles.

'Move. Now.'

In that instant Damon cursed his refusal to ever learn a proper barrier spell. He had relied too much on raw power and speed, on transforming into a shadow. None of that existed here in this body.

He gritted his teeth and crossed his arms, forcing the mirror seraph's body to morph into a shield.

Before the shield fully formed, Damon saw a spark ignite at the center of the hollow corpse.

A wave of destruction detonated outward.

The mirror shield shattered. Damon was thrown across the cavern, smashing into pillars and tumbling over rubble. Shards of mirror trailed behind him in glittering arcs as violent mana tore through the seraph's form.

He crashed into the far wall, buried beneath broken stone.

Lazarak snarled, twisting darkness into weapons instead of chains. He hurled them toward the Mother with brutal force.

"Damon!" he roared. "Damon, speak to me, are you okay?"

His voice was raw, cracking from how hard he was screaming. The battle's thunder made anything quieter impossible to hear.

Damon pushed out of the rubble, his body fractured and bleeding liquid mirror.

"I'm better than ever. I only took an explosion to the face."

Lazarak let out a breath of relief.

"Careful. You might get hit."

Damon lifted his sword, eyes locked on the Mother of Stillbirths.

"A little too late for that."

Chapter 804: Nothing Personal

Lazarak was about to say something when he sensed an incoming attack. He created a chain of darkness that pulled him down just in time to evade the swipe of one of the dirty umbilical cords.

He didn't want to be touched by whatever that amniotic fluid was made of, it looked and smelled disgusting.

His gaze turned to Damon with a frown.

"That was a close one," he muttered, realizing he had let his worry for his friend carry him away.

Damon charged into battle again. The pain from his wounds was nothing. This body wasn't exactly human, so it didn't bleed red blood, and it wasn't even his, so there was no need for him to care for it too much.

It was a vessel he was using. Still, he was more interested in what had struck him.

"What was that... anyway?" he asked Lazarak, who was more ancient and had some clue.

Lazarus had been here since the world came to be. He had experience no amount of study could compete with and had lived what was written in books.

"It's magic," Lazarak replied, stepping over a slanted wall as several umbilical cords lunged after him. The cords shattered rocks after attacking Damon, they lost their momentum leaving them vulnerable.

"I know. I'm asking which kind," Damon said, his eyes narrowing. That was not just fire magic.

Lazarak twined himself around Damon as they spun between two of the umbilical cords. He was more disgusted by them than worried about being impaled.

"It's multi-attribute magic. Spells that combine two or more attributes pack a lot of power," Lazarak said.

This was common knowledge to him, but Damon was too young to understand how magic worked when the world still had multiple attributes.

"Wouldn't there be a conflict?" Damon asked.

Lazarak glanced at the mother of stillbirths as chains of darkness pulled her down.

"No, if you use the right sequence, it works. This type of magic is obsolete now, since people can only use one attribute."

Damon nodded and pointed his hand at the mother.

"How about I repay an expulsion with an expulsion or maybe two?"

Magic formed long, deadly projectiles.

[Magic Missile.]

Volatile lances of magical energy shot forward toward the bound mother of stillbirths.

She struggled to break free, but the glowing white projectiles traveled too fast. As soon as they reached her, they exploded in a deafening series of bangs and shocks that made the air tremble and sent her smoking body flying.

One of her umbilical cords was severed and flew in the opposite direction. She crashed into the ground with a shriek.

Lazarak glanced in her direction as her damaged body squealed and split, giving birth to another hollow, lifeless stillborn. As soon as it emerged, it raised its hand. A green healing light spread over the mother, mending her wounds as if she had been uninjured all along.

Damon narrowed his eyes.

"What the hell type of magic is that?"

He knew it was healing magic. If it were tied to a single attribute, it would be light, water, or fire but he sensed none of those.

Was this a conceptual attribute he didn't recognize.

"That's healing magic. This particular one is based on none-attribute magic. I imagine it's no longer in use," Lazarak explained, familiar with the deeper intricacies of magic.

Damon nodded slowly.

"I see. But how is she using multiple attributes? Everyone who isn't part of the loophole of being a stillborn only has one attribute, right?"

Lazarak didn't dwell on it.

"That's what the stillborns are for. The hollow, mindless ones she creates are merely vessels of her will. Each of them has a unique attribute, or in this case, multiple attributes. Since they have no will, she can possess them."

"Creating a unique magical effect," Damon added coldly, raising his dealer's hand. His blade gleamed as the half-broken sword filled with mana and reacted to his killing intent.

"So we just have to kill her faster than she can reproduce those things."

Lazarak raised his hand with a cold expression.

"I don't condone murder, but I despise senseless cruelty even more. Let's destroy this hideous thing."

From his raised hands, darkness began to spread, pooling around him and covering his body. Or rather, it was his body becoming darkness itself, spreading and growing into the cavern.

When Damon had first met Lazarak, he had been a formless darkness. Now he was resuming that form, but offensively.

The darkness spread like a wave, smashing through walls and spreading wildly.

The mother of stillbirths saw the darkness coming and knew running was not an option. She split open to give birth once more, producing a few hollow stillborn.

As soon as they were born, their forms radiated a bright white light. They were tossed toward the encroaching darkness. When the darkness met the light, they exploded. The white light threatened to push back the spreading darkness.

For a brief moment, the world was split between two forces: a beautiful white glow and a deep darkness that tried to engulf it.

The mother raised her umbilical cords, pushing the light back and sending the darkness scattering. Lazarak emerged with a smile on his face.

"You fell for it."

As soon as she saw him, the mother realized the other one...Damon, who was supposed to be inside the darkness with Lazarak was gone.

At that same moment, she sensed something behind her. Her umbilical cords, which made up her grotesque form, trembled. It was too late to react.

Damon's hand created hundreds of swords behind her, all aimed at point-blank range.

"Nothing personal. You're just in the way."

The hundreds of swords shot forward, tearing into her hideous form before she could react. Flesh was shredded into tiny pieces and then ripped further into blood mist by the barrage.

There was nothing left. Only blood. From her death, everywhere went silent. The stillborns stopped moving, then fell one by one.

Damon heard a small chime.

[You have slain mother of stillbirths.]

#### Chapter 805: The Witness

He felt his body grow heavy as the notification echoed through his head, announcing the death of the Mother of Stillbirths.

Damon drew a long breath and collapsed to his knees. Hundreds of stillborn around him began to fall one by one, their fragile forms crumbling into dust as they touched the ground. The air filled with drifting motes of ash.

His gaze shifted to the place where he had shredded the Mother of Stillbirths. From the pool of her blood, a small object glimmered faintly.

Lazarak approached and slowly picked it up.

"We now have the key to the last trial. Our escape is at hand, my friend."

Damon nodded and pushed himself to his feet. His breath came heavy as he looked at the remaining shades drifting in the dark around them.

"Then what are we waiting for. I cannot wait to get out of this hell hole."

Lazarak smiled at his words.

"Yes. Likewise. After several thousand years I wonder how the world has changed."

Damon clenched his fist as a sharp sting twisted in his chest. They had reached the end of their imprisonment. It meant he would finally step outside of Eidolon. The thought filled him with uncertainty and quiet dread. If he returned to the world, he might have to face the truth that his friends were long dead, consumed by nightmares.

'But what if they were still alive and waiting for me outside.'

No matter what, he still had to keep moving. Whatever cure existed for his sister was out there, beyond this prison. He could not allow himself to break now.

He had endured too long to falter now.

'Just one more stretch before it all ends.'

The thought lit a fire in his heart. Damon could not wait any longer. He had to leave this place.

"Let us go. To the next trial."

Lazarak's eyes widened as he stared up at Damon with a stunned expression.

"Huh. What. Why. We just finished one trial. We need to rest and plan."

Damon's eyes carried a deep longing, a weary exhaustion he always tried to hide beneath a mask of indifference or chaotic playfulness.

Lazarak sighed. There was nothing he could say to change Damon's mind. He understood him too well. After a journey this long, the final stretch always felt unbearable. The more you desired something, the less you could wait. And that was when people became reckless and made the most dangerous mistakes.

Damon knew that too. But he still could not wait. His fist tightened as he spoke softly.

"The lower you get in Eidolon, the worse the prisoners and the wardens become. But Lazarak, we are the worst this prison has to offer. At the lowest level, all the way down on the deep seventh floor, we had no warden because none were worthy of stopping us."

His voice grew cold and unshaken.

"All they could do was bind us with powerful chains, yet we broke free. And here we are on the second floor of Eidolon. None have escaped before. None have defeated its wardens except us."

He lifted his hand slowly, his fist trembling with resolve.

"None but us. We dared because we could not be restrained. We have already defeated what should have stopped us. Why should the first and weakest of these wardens matter. We are injured and tired. Good. We can give the wretches a handicap."

Lazarak froze as he listened. Damon's voice carried a strange heat, something intoxicating. It stirred the already blazing heart of the god of darkness.

"The world is just beyond this prison. Let us take it on. Together."

A smile bloomed on Lazarak's face and he laughed at Damon's words. He had been silent for so long, but those words stirred something deep within him.

"To victory or death. Let us change this world forever."

Damon returned the smile. He forced his broken, trembling body upright and stepped forward through the darkened corridor.

Lazarak walked beside him in the form of a small toddler, yet in that moment he felt vast, deep, like a sea of serene darkness.

Matia flicked the blood from her sword.

She waved her hand and the blade vanished into the ether. Her blue eyes followed them. She was the only witness to this moment. Perhaps the only one who would remember the day Damon Grey and Lazarak set out to confront the world.

The two were different, yet chaotically similar.

Each defied for a reason.

One defied because it was his nature, driven by an ego that refused to bend. He carried an eternal, silent scream toward gods who never heard his suffering.

Toward gods who never saw his anguish. He lived only for his sister, clinging to the single purpose of her salvation. And now that it was within reach, he no longer had any reason to endure. This was his final war.

The thought made a single tear fall from Matia's eyes. Her helm hid what lay beneath, but behind the cold metallic ice was the face of a woman whose eyes were blurred with tears she fought to contain. She was the only witness to a tragedy still unfolding.

And the other was no better.

Gods were cruel, and when they were not, they were weak. Here stood a weak god who wished to be strong, a god who wished to change the world. The first god who failed to be chosen had chosen instead to be the first to change everything.

"And together they march to death."

"Where I will be their only witness."

Tears slipped from her helm and struck the ground with soft splatters. Matia hated that she had regained her emotions and memories. They only made her feel weak.

She touched her helm to ensure her face remained hidden. She wore it because she never wanted Damon to see her falter again.

She clenched her fists and stepped toward them.

"I will not be a silent witness."

If there was ruin, then she would be there, for that was her fate as the Ruin Fairy.

A sword for a defiant shadow driven by a desire for his oblivion.

## Chapter 806: Hollow Saint

It was a risky choice to move forward without any plans, but the entire battle with the Mother of Stillbirths had proven one thing. No plan was absolute. No one could see the future.

With each step he took, Damon pushed himself further into an uncertain fate. His breathing steadied, then sharpened as the cold air of the cavern brushed across his skin.

The path to the next trial was nothing but a silent wall. As they approached it, Damon lifted the key taken from the slain Mother of Stillbirths. The cavern trembled.

The stone cracked. The wall split open like a wounded beast revealing its ribs.

Damon stepped through first, shoulders squared, jaw tight. Lazarak followed in his small childlike form, shadowed eyes flicking over every corner.

Matia trailed behind them with slow, measured steps, her fingers resting near the hilt of her sword out of habit.

The moment they crossed the threshold, whispers curled through the air. Damon's ear twitched. The voices sounded as if countless people had been imprisoned inside this place.

Each whisper carried a piece of a memory. Rage, happiness, sorrow. All of it braided together into something that felt like faith. The sound seeped out of the darkness itself.

The chamber was dark except for a single ray of pale light in the center. A lone figure knelt within it, hands clasped, body still as stone.

He prayed before a massive statue of the Goddess of Doom. Her veiled face remained hidden, yet the cold beauty carved into the white stone radiated divinity. Her presence seemed to freeze the air around her.

Damon's eyes narrowed as he looked at the kneeling man. The garment was familiar. It was the attire worn by the Inquisition, the fanatical devotees of doom.

The temple branch that should not have existed until a few hundred thousand years in the future

He sneered. Of all places to encounter a temple fanatic, Eidolon's ancient depths were not the one he expected. Then again, this prison had been built by lesser gods who worshiped doom long before any organized temple did. Perhaps the temple had copied them and not the other way around.

The man's prayers were soft. Damon leaned slightly, trying to catch the words, but they dissolved into the air before reaching him.

Lazarak glanced at Damon. Damon lifted his chin in suspicion, eyes sharpening as he scanned the area. The single ray of light made the scene feel sacred, almost fragile. Speaking here felt like intruding on a ceremony not meant for mortals.

"Pray to the goddess. Kneel and beg for forgiveness."

The voice drifted from the praying figure. Damon snorted. Pray. Kneel. What a joke. He was not an atheist. He knew the goddess existed. He simply refused to worship her.

He twisted his lip into a mocking grin.

"I am not faithful. I will pass. Let us skip the formalities and move to the part where we try to kill each other."

The kneeling figure did not flinch. His back remained straight, hands locked together in unwavering devotion.

"I am not a fighter. I lack the skill to carry out violence and spread the glory of the goddess. Thus I kneel here, begging for forgiveness."

Lazarak shifted, his small form leaning slightly forward. His eyes traced the figure with growing curiosity. In Eidolon, everyone was technically a prisoner, even the wardens trapped within their assigned roles. Could this kneeling man be the same?

"Can you not leave," Lazarak asked, voice steady.

The man did not lift his head. His forehead nearly touched the ground.

"We cannot leave until our sins are forgiven by the goddess," he said in a slow, hollow voice.

Damon turned to the surrounding darkness. His eyes narrowed. He could normally see through any shadow, especially after obtaining Darkness Dominate. Anything that was not Lazarak's body had no hope of hiding from him. But this darkness was different. It was black but not true darkness. There was no depth to it, no texture. Just an empty void.

He crossed his arms.

"Who are you anyway?"

The man continued to pray.

"I am a saint. A human who has devoted his life to the goddess. Sadly, like all humans, I am weak and frail."

Damon lifted one brow, almost amused.

Weak and Frail, Humans. What nonsense. Humans were one of the most violent races in existence. War was their language. Extinction was their craft.

"Whatever gave you that impression. Humans are not weak. If you are weak, that sounds like a skill issue."

The man still did not move.

"Yes. It is as you say. I am weak. And I dared blame my weakness on a race created by the goddess. I have sinned again."

Damon's face twisted in disgust. Even so, curiosity flickered in his eyes.

"Who the hell are you? What's your name.?"

The man lowered his head further. His voice grew even more somber.

"I am the Hollow Saint. A saint whose prayers have not yet been answered. An inferior saint."

Damon exhaled through his nose and crossed his arms more tightly.

"Look here buddy, I am not interested in your sad story. Why are you praying to the goddess directly? Is the whole idea not that you pray to the lesser gods and they carry your message to her."

His tone was mocking, but beneath it there was genuine interest.

The Hollow Saint responded with the same defeated calm.

"I am ashamed to admit the lesser gods want nothing to do with one such as I. Thus I pray here. Only the goddess can free me."

Damon shook his head.

"What trial is this," Lazarak asked, his gaze fixed on the saint.

The Hollow Saint did not turn.

"This is the Trial of Faith. We must show our faith and beg the goddess for forgiveness. When she answers, we will be free to leave the imaginary prison of Eidolon."

Damon's eyes narrowed. He looked at Lazarak with a frown. A trial where they were expected to bow and beg the very goddess responsible for their imprisonment. If she answered, they could leave. If not...

"And if we do not," Lazarak asked softly.

The saint lifted a hand and gestured toward the empty dark.

"Then you are free to attempt to leave. But you will discover, as I have, how unforgiving the darkness truly is."

Damon smirked at the kneeling saint, then stared into the false void. His eyes hardened.

He feared no darkness.

"I will take my chances with the darkness."

## Chapter 807: Self Determination

It was arrogant but Damon had always been arrogant. He was not religious. Why would he be? God did not care about them.

Religion was just an opium fed to the foolish. They would accept the injustice of the world. It was a tool used to control the masses.

The goddess did exist but sadly she was indifferent.

Everyone liked to believe their religion was right. Their God was kind and wanted the best for them. They believed the teachings that they may or may not even understand, written by some long dead people who shaped agendas and interpretations that served their own views and vices.

But was it really true? People were born into their religion. You did not know if it was right or wrong. You had simply been indoctrinated. It was correct because your father practiced it. Your mother taught you it was correct. Their predecessors had done so for thousands of years. And so faith became a reason to kill others who had a different indoctrination.

Even then humans could not do without faith. God must exist. If not, then why did humans need faith? Why were we at peace when we believed our joys and woes were in the hands of forces far beyond our control and comprehension.

It was an intentional biological design.

Faith was tied into the very concept of being human because God became a known thing that eliminated the fear of the unknown.

Damon chose to walk into the darkness. His words echoed behind him toward the hollow saint who continued to kneel.

"How pathetic to kneel to something man has carved from stone."

Faith was a mysterious thing. It was a belief without proof. Then if religion was faith, was God even real or were humans simply praying to themselves, building meanings where none existed.

Damon did not lack faith. If that was what defined it. He simply lacked faith in the goodness of gods.

He stepped deeper into the darkness. Killing the hollow saint crossed his mind, the instinct still lingering from the trial of sin, but Damon dismissed it. There was no point in needless slaughter. They were all trapped in this place.

When Damon entered the darkness, Lazarak followed, and Matia moved silently behind them. The darkness swallowed them whole. Damon could not see nor hear anything. Up was dark. Down was dark. Left and right were the same. Only his own breathing told him he still existed.

"So this is the obstacle keeping us from leaving."

His voice bounced back at him in hollow echoes as if he spoke in a vast empty chamber.

"Lazarak, what do you..." He stopped. Lazarak was gone. Matia too. The god of darkness had vanished along with her.

Damon exhaled slowly, steadying himself. He knew it would not be that easy. Still he moved forward. If there was an end to this place he would find it.

He walked. Then walked more. Time slipped away. His head throbbed. His thoughts grew heavy. Doubts crawled through his mind. He had walked in a straight line for what felt like hours and hours. He hoped Lazarak and Matia were somewhere behind him, but the absolute silence and endless void gnawed at him.

The terrain never changed. The same flat, barren nothing. The same smothering black that devoured all sense of depth or direction.

He thought of going back. He crushed the thought at once. He grit his teeth and unfurled the wings of the Mirror Seraph. The glass feathers shimmered faintly against the void.

Flying was risky. Something could strike him down. Yet he needed to confirm at least one direction. Up.

He leaped and soared through the void. The wings beat soundlessly. No wind touched him. No resistance or change. He rose higher and higher and still the world remained exactly the same.

There was no end to this darkness. He could fly forever.

"I need to go back." As soon as he said this, his eyes caught something. A light far ahead. His heart jolted with a surge of hope. He snapped his wings wide and rocketed toward it. In mere seconds he broke through the void and landed at its source.

He froze when he saw where he was.

Lazarak stood with his arms crossed, Matia silent beside him. The hollow saint still knelt praying before the statue of the goddess. Nothing had changed.

Lazarak smiled slightly. "Welcome back. You've been gone for a month."

Damon narrowed his eyes. He landed beside Lazarak, studying the untouched scene.

"A month. I've been gone that long huh."

"It seems this trial is a bit tricky."

Lazarak's tone was calm but wary.

The hollow saint did not move. His voice floated softly from his kneeling position.

"You spent a whole month wandering aimlessly. If you had joined me in prayer the goddess would have answered us by now."

Damon frowned. Something was wrong. He turned toward the darkness again.

"This darkness is like faith. It is endless. Without faith you are lost. But with faith we become like the hollow saint. We become stagnant, relying on the divine to solve problems we can fix ourselves."

He looked at Matia and opened his palm. She immediately understood. Frost gathered around her hands and she shaped a massive axe of ice, placing it firmly into Damon's grip.

Damon hefted it, feeling its weight. He walked toward the hollow saint. Footsteps echoed through the chamber. The saint did not flinch though he clearly sensed Damon's approach. Even with a massive axe drawn, he didn't move.

He lifted his face slightly. A serene, relieved expression crossed it.

"At last. My time has come."

He embraced the possibility of death without fear.

Damon raised the axe. Muscles tightened. Frost glittered across the blade.

He swung downward with full force.

But the axe was not aimed at the saint.

With a shattering crack, the blade smashed into the statue of the goddess, splitting it apart.

Light erupted from the broken stone, flooding the world, tearing apart the darkness.

"Faith is important. But it must never be blind. And we must never be slaves to it."

The trial was not about defying a god. It was about accepting that gods existed yet choosing your own power, your own direction, your own life.

That was the key to the first trial and last trial.

Chapter 808: Evils Unleashed

It was that simple. It was straightforward. The pattern had been there the entire time. The options were plain. Kneel and pray to the goddess until she forgave them and freed them.

It was straightforward, in hindsight it was a matter of time, you simply had to be patient.

Then surely remorse and repentance were the way out of the trial of faith. After all the warden, the hollow saint, was not a fighter.

However, if that was truly the case, then why wasn't the hollow saint free from the trial. It could not be the answer.

And so, after his time wandering the darkness, Damon reached a conclusion. The way out of the trial of faith was the rejection of the divine. That was why he destroyed the statue.

The darkness was expelled. Light erupted and pushed through every corner. The white glow illuminated what had once been a bleak void and, with the darkness gone, a large metal door emerged. Hundreds of magic seals were interlocked across it in a complex pattern Damon did not even understand.

Still, it held a quiet beauty. The etchings shimmered over the silver surface, faint and inviting.

"How... How can you destroy the goddess? How can you break the trial..."

The hollow saint's voice trembled. Fear and confusion weighed on every syllable.

"This... this is blasphemy. We would be inviting divine retribution. The end is neigh..."

Damon looked at him and released a soft sigh.

"The end is always neigh. If the end comes, it will not be because of gods but the decree of man."

It was mankind that shaped their world. They built their towers, grew their crops, mastered nature. The goddess existed but Damon had never seen her act.

The hollow saint lowered his head.

"Why... why, if it was so... why have I been here..."

He had been trapped for longer than his natural lifespan, longer than his fourth rank power should have ever allowed. He had knelt so long he no longer knew whether his legs were still part of his body. Only to find the answer was as simple as smashing a statue.

Damon shrugged.

"I never really like fanaticism. Too much sweat for something as fickle as blind faith. That's the difference between me and you."

He stepped closer, gazing down at the hollow saint.

"You wait for a god to give you something. I get what I want myself. Because I know gods don't care. Praying for something easily achieved by human hands is pathetic."

Damon had lived enough to understand the pointlessness of waiting for divine favor. And even if you got it there was a steep price.

"But without god we are nothing but beasts..."

The saint's voice cracked. He clung to his belief with shaking hands.

"And with god we are monsters. We have killed and done worse in the name of the goddess."

The hollow saint's shoulders trembled. Tears dripped onto the floor. His entire life, every belief, was unraveling before him. Damon understood that feeling. Eidolon had changed him in ways he could not yet name.

"What about faith... what about faith..."

The saint screamed and grabbed his head.

"Lord Aetherus, what about faith? What about my devotion? Faith is meaningless... it's useless..."

He ranted like a man whose mind had split under the weight of truth. Lazarak raised his small hand and touched his arm, stopping him.

"You misunderstood the point my friend is making. Faith is not lost. And it is not useless. We must have faith, but it must never be blind. Blind faith turns us into cattle."

The saint slowly lifted his head, staring at Lazarak's infant form.

"The question is not 'Do gods exist?' It is 'What do you owe a god?'"

Lazarak spoke gently.

"Your answer must be... nothing but acknowledgment of their existence. Respect is optional. Obedience is a choice. And faith must be earned, not inherited."

The words shook the hollow saint more than the shattering of the statue. He dropped to the floor, sitting numbly.

Lazarak understood Damon. He learned from him. But he also understood Damon was changing.

This was not nihilism. Not rebellion for its own sake. This was self-determination in a world where gods demanded obedience by default.

Damon inspired the god who watched him.

For a god who fears being forgotten, Damon's defiance was intoxicating. Damon was everything Lazarak was not. Self-determined, unafraid, and unbound by divine expectation.

Lazarak was mad. Damon was mad. But Damon's madness burned differently. Lazarak bit his lip then smiled faintly.

'He's going to change the world. I know it.'

Lazarak thought silently. And yet a wave of sadness passed through his heart.

"I... I won't be there to see it, will I..." he whispered to himself as Damon walked toward the grand magical door.

Damon looked over his shoulder with a small frown.

"Where's the key?"

Lazarak turned to the hollow saint. The man stood up for the first time in ages, legs shaking, and stumbled toward the broken statue. He pawed through the stone fragments until he found a glowing object buried inside.

He rushed toward Damon and offered it with trembling hands.

Damon took it casually. He lifted the key, feeling the cold bite of the metal.

As soon as it neared the silver doors, the magic seals reacted. Light spread through the patterns. Chains of mana unraveled. The ancient doors groaned and pushed outward.

Damon's heart pounded. A raw, liberating rush surged through him.

The doors opened. A soft ray of light touched his face, and the gentle breeze from the outside world brushed against his skin.

At last he was free. And for the lower world...

The evils imprisoned in Eidolon were unleashed.

The final act had begun. From now on they would face the world itself.

"I'll find a cure for my sister. No matter what it takes."

Damon's cold voice echoed into the sky, carrying his will across the land.

Let the heavens of this lower world bear witness.

To the boy who had failed to die.

#### Chapter 809: Metamorphosis

With freedom at hand you would think Damon would be eager to leave. However, that was not the case. Instead he found himself standing in the deepest levels of Eidolon once again.

It wasn't that he didn't want to leave. It was that he couldn't. His body was shattered and all that remained was his heart of shadows. For that reason he had to rebuild his body.

The way to do that was to devour goddess-race corpses, but he didn't have any left here. He could only try to find an alternative.

The alternative in this case was the thousands of shades he had left over from the battle with the Mother of Stillbirths.

Bringing the shades down here had been difficult. Many of them were destroyed when Damon passed through the Garden of Hunger, but the ones that survived should be enough to reconstruct his body.

The ones who had been guarding this place were his shadow Ghost, and the lesser demon that had been in his shadow. They had done the important task of ensuring no one destroyed Damon's heart of shadow.

Lazarak watched quietly as Damon's astral form slipped out of the Mirror Seraph's body and drifted back into the floating heart in front of him. The Mirror Seraph's body fell to the ground as Damon returned to his own, or at least what remained of it.

Returning to his body was a great feeling even if he didn't technically have one yet.

"Come." His voice resonated from the heart. At his command hundreds of shades drifted toward the black flames. Their forms shuddered as the fire caught them. They dissolved into the flames one after another. As they died he heard the system chimes.

[You have slain shade]

[You have slain shade]

[You have slain shade]

[You have slain shade]

[You have slain shade]

.....

Slowly, as each shade was devoured, the flames and shadows began to thicken. They condensed, forming solid strands that fused to the pitch black heart. A human silhouette slowly emerged.

The form was black and made of writhing shadows. It collapsed like liquid then formed again, repeating the cycle as if Damon were struggling to remember his original shape. Eventually the shadows stabilized. From the inky form a single shadow peeled away and spread across the ground into a flat silhouette.

Damon slowly felt muscle forming, organs pulsing into existence, bones tightening, skin pulling taut, flesh knitting across him. Everything that made him human returned piece by piece. At last the outer layer of shadow slid away from his body and merged with the shadow at his feet.

He looked at his hands with a thin smile, then glanced at the shadow below him.

"Hey there, buddy. Been a while." He spoke to his own shadow without hesitation.

The shadow raised its hand and waved at him in a playful gesture, its movement radiating excitement.

Damon nodded, understanding the message.

"Hmm. I see. I get it. Thanks anyway."

Without a body he had no shadow to reflect, but now he was whole again.

He turned to Lazarak, who was staring at him with a stupefied expression.

"What, not gonna say I'm ugly now?" Damon teased, remembering how Lazarak had called him ugly when they first met.

Lazarak raised a brow and looked him up and down.

"Ermm. You are surprisingly younger than I expected. You're practically a child. I mean, you mentioned you were seventeen but I thought you were joking."

Damon rolled his eyes. The toddler god looked awkward, so to clear the air he added,

"Nice horn, by the way."

Damon raised an eyebrow.

"Huh? What?"

Lazarak pointed at Damon's head.

"I mean, I said you were ugly, so I figured you would appreciate a compliment on that little horn you're showing off."

Damon reached up to the right side of his head and felt nothing. When he moved his hand to the left side he froze. His fingers brushed a sharp, smooth protrusion like polished obsidian.

There was something on his head. It was small, but unmistakably there.

He turned to Matia wearing a horrified expression, but she seemed equally taken aback. No. This was an unusual turn of events.

She understood he wanted to see it with his own eyes instead of relying on shadow perception. So she raised her hand and formed a smooth mirror of ice, angling it toward him.

Damon stared at his reflection. His face was smooth and pale like corpse skin. His hair hung long to his shoulders. His eyes were dark and lightless. He looked as handsome as ever, perhaps even more so. His vanity flickered for a heartbeat.

But there, nestled in his dark hair, was a small black protrusion. It looked almost like a decorative ornament, but it was unmistakably a horn.

Not just any horn. A strange aura clung to it.

"This... this is a demon horn." He muttered in disbelief. He had grown a single demon horn.

Damon shook his head. This couldn't be happening. No. Not to him. A horn.

"I'm... am I... no. I'm turning into a demon."

This had been inevitable. Damon's seed of depravity had grown from his despair, and from that despair and anguish he had begun the unstoppable transformation into a demon.

The first natural demon in a long time.

A true demon.

Still, Damon could not accept having a horn. Not because he despised demons, but because as a member of the goddess races he could not be seen as one.

He reached up, grabbed the newly grown horn that was still soft, and with an expression as cold as ice he twisted. A soft crunch echoed through him and a splitting pain ripped down to his core.

He pulled it free as blood poured down the side of his head.

To close the wound he released a burst of flames over his skull, cauterizing the injury. He picked up a healing potion from the ground and poured it over the burned flesh.

It was agonizing, but seamless.

He smiled as if he hadn't just done something equivalent to peeling his own skin and ripping out his tendons.

"Now that should do it. I look as human as always."

Chapter 810: Time

Lazarak winced slightly at the sight; his face remained frozen in a grimace, shoulders tightening as if bracing against a chill. What Damon had done looked unnerving even to a god who had lived for a very long time.

Perhaps it was equivalent to someone looking at their perfectly good eyeball, casually deciding they didn't like it, then reaching out their fingers and pulling it out and discarding it on the ground.

The implications were not lost on him, but at the same time Damon felt something different: his physical body pulsed with explosive power, every muscle coiled with an overwhelming sense of energy.

His magic circuits felt clear, mana passively flowing with a refined current.

This was the boon of his partial demonization.

But Damon felt like he lost something too, though he didn't know what... His fingers flexed once, testing the emptiness inside himself.

Was that why he had discarded his guilt...?

No. Damon shook his head, brushing it off. He was just fine carrying so much baggage in his heart.

Lazarak sighed, rubbing his forehead.

"Why... did you do that to yourself? Why would you mutilate your own body...?"

Damon raised an eyebrow, a small twitch of irritation crossing his face. Why, that was a ridiculous question.

"My sister hates demons. Do I need any other reason...?"

That was true. Damon was well aware how much Luna hated demons. She'd hated them for years. He could tell her their parents didn't get killed by demons, but honestly it would make little difference. She was a child raised in Valtheron; everyone hated demons there. It was as natural as breathing.

Though oddities like Damon existed who, well... Damon hated everyone. Though after meeting Lilith, his mild distaste for demons shifted into a cold indifference.

Still, becoming a demon was the last thing he wanted.

Lazarak frowned, his fist slowly curling as if restraining something.

"Is that a good enough reason...?"

Damon shook his head slowly, his gaze drifting away and back.

"It's not for you... but I come from a world and time where being a demon is considered the greatest of atrocities among the goddess races."

Lazarak frowned again, but he wasn't wearing the confused expression Damon expected.

"From the looks of things you already know what demons are..." Damon glared at Lazarak coolly, his eyes narrowing just a fraction.

Lazarak crossed his arms, shifting his weight.

"I'm a god. I've heard some things."

Damon's expression remained unchanged, a stone mask.

"Then you also know that when we talk about returning to Aetherus, I'm not referring to the same one as you."

Lazarak didn't flinch.

"I figured as much..." He walked toward the cocoon in the dark chamber, trailing his fingers lightly along the wall before glancing at Damon.

"Your magic is too advanced and refined for a single-attribute mana. That's not something a few thousand years can fix."

He smiled at Damon calmly.

"I knew from the very beginning. There was never a doubt in my mind that you didn't belong to this era."

Damon slowly moved to the end of the altar where he had been standing. He sat down with a muted thud, giving Lazarak a cool expression, a lukewarm reaction to everything.

"If you couldn't figure all that out after so many clues, then you would have lived your thousands of years in vain..."

Lazarak glanced at Damon with a small smile, tapping a finger lightly on his arm.

"So now what... everything is out in the open, friend..."

Damon glanced back, then smiled faintly.

"Nothing. I just think you're a manipulative, maniacal madman who convinces himself he's actually a good guy just because he has a no-murder policy... but the truth is you're selfish, just like me, and that's why I knew we would work together."

Lazarak chuckled lightly, covering his mouth with two fingers as if holding back something harsher.

"You are a very paranoid person, my friend..."

Damon chuckled as well, his shoulders relaxing slightly.

"I'd be crazy to believe a minor god created by the goddess of doom would be simple... that said, we still have goals to accomplish..."

Lazarak smiled, shaking his head.

"I already threw my lot in with the devil, didn't I...?"

Damon closed one eye, half-grinning.

"Right back at ya..."

Lazarak sighed, reaching out to touch the cocoon in front of him, his hand hovering first as if gauging its temperature.

"Since we are leaving, we might as well take our little friend here with us."

Damon looked at the odd cocoon in the corner, leaning slightly to get a better angle.

"We really don't know what that thing is capable of..."

Lazarak smiled at Damon.

"Relax. I'm a god, I got this. Trust me, nothing's gonna happen."

He reached out and began trying to remove the cocoon from the corner of the chamber, muscles tensing subtly beneath his dark robe.

Damon frowned slightly at Lazarak's confidence.

"If you already know... don't you want to ask me what happens in the future? I am the key to tomorrow's events."

Lazarak paused mid-motion. Damon watched him closely; any other man would at least be tempted.

"I'd tell you—"

"No." Lazarak raised a hand, stopping him.

"It doesn't matter what tomorrow holds. I have today to accomplish my goals."

Damon blinked once, confused. Was Lazarak worried about creating a paradox... or—

"I'm not worried about that... because we wouldn't be creating one anyway."

He turned to Damon with a calm expression.

"You don't know this because you're just mortal, but... time is linear, flowing in a single line. The past, present, and future are all occurring at the same time. An event from the future shapes the past as much as the past shapes the future."

He smiled at Damon, placing a hand briefly on the cocoon as if to anchor his point.

"Everywhere is fertile, so it matters not where we plant the seed. We but need to nurture it."

Damon was quiet for a moment, taken by Lazarak's words. His fingers tapped once against his knee.

"Then doesn't that mean everything we do is pointless, and we can never change our fates because our actions have already created the outcome...?" he answered back.

He muttered under his breath, thinking.

'If that was the case, then the Unknown God was right when he said time was the greatest destroyer.'

Damon felt as if he finally realized how the formless chains of time hold everyone, though unseen, undefeated because no one recognizes them.

He finally understood what Waton of Valtheron meant in the final moments of his life when he said.

"Stop time." He was trying to defy time.