

## **Shadow 881**

Chapter 881: A Full Time Job

The chains fell silent.

For a moment the chamber did not react, as if the tower itself refused to accept what had just happened. Then the glow in the hanging chains flickered, crimson dimming to a sickly rust, before shattering entirely. Metal clattered to the floor like dead serpents.

The High Prophet's body twitched once.

Then it began to come apart.

Cracks of pale light spread from the point where Broken Bonds had pierced him, crawling across his chest, his throat, his face. His mouth opened as if to scream, but no sound came.

The disintegration did not consume him violently. Instead, a maw rose from the shadows and devoured him.

A fourth class powerhouse.

Erased.

The sword drank deep.

Damon stood there for several seconds, swaying slightly, blood still pouring from the ruin carved across his torso. His shadow peeled itself off the pillar and slid back beneath his feet, merging seamlessly, as if it had never left.

His shadow hunger dropped abruptly from the brink of ravenous back into something manageable.

Damon gasped as he took out a healing potion and slowly poured its contents over his wounds.

The pain gradually subsided as he healed, his flesh knitting together. He took a deep breath.

Well, that was a relief. If he had not been so careful and so lucky, he would have died right now.

He stood up and slowly began to walk toward the door leading to where he would find the elixir, his breathing heavy.

"Fourth class advancements are still so annoying to deal with."

He walked through several doors until he reached a glowing door at the end. He stepped through it and found himself in a white room.

The floor consisted of massive pillars, spaced apart. To reach the other side, one would have to walk on top of them.

Damon did not hesitate. As soon as he placed his foot on a pillar, a wide path appeared over them.

"Illusion magic."

He glanced forward and stepped onto the hidden path. Slowly, he began to walk toward the end of the room.

When he reached the elixir, he frowned.

There was blood on it.

The spinning contraption that held the fluid, which looked like sparkling gold, had been slightly stained.

Damon scoffed softly.

"Lilith, I know you're here. I can smell gardenia in the air. And Sylvia too, I imagine."

He turned around and found both of them standing in front of him.

Sylvia pouted slightly.

"So you knew Lilith was here, but not me."

Damon smiled at the elf girl's obvious jealousy.

"Of course not. I figured you'd be here."

Sylvia glanced at Lilith.

"Why? Because of her god awful smell."

Lilith clenched her fist.

"This is hardly the time to throw shade at me. Don't let him manipulate you."

Sylvia sighed and looked at Damon.

"Sorry Damon. Normally I'd let you have your way with me, but today isn't a good day for me, okay."

Damon grimaced slightly at how she put it.

"Can you not make it sound like I do terrible things to you. I may be dying, but I want to keep my reputation. I'd hate to be that guy everyone pisses on his grave."

Sylvia narrowed her eyes. The gray irises turned cold in a way he had never seen before, at least not directed at him.

"So you're breaking your promise then. The one you made to me at the academy."

She bit her lip, lowering her head.

"You promised me the world."

Damon felt a sting in his heart when he saw her expression, the sadness in her eyes.

"I'm sorry, Sylvia. For not being able to keep my promise. I'm sorry for making light of your feelings. I'm sorry for using you too."

"Besides, if I gave you the world, where is everyone else going to live?"

He lowered his head as a deep darkness settled in his heart. His seed of depravity stirred, growing slightly in his chest. A horn slowly pushed from his head, followed by another forming along his back. Burning pain surged as something tried to emerge.

Outside, the fighting continued. His shadow drones slaughtered the enemy, and with every death, resentment and souls were fed into his seed of depravity, nourishing it with despair and ruin.

"I don't want your apology."

Sylvia spoke without caring that she was witnessing the first case of true demonization in centuries, the birth of another great demon lord in the making.

All she saw was Damon, looking as depressed as he had been the first time she bumped into him in that library.

"I just want you to live. That's all I'm asking. It's fine, okay. It's fine if you like other women. I can learn to stand them. So please."

Damon wore a warm, almost gentle smile as Sylvia pleaded with him not to end his life.

He glanced at Lilith, who had not spoken. She wore the expression she always had when mentally preparing for something big.

"What about you? Not going to say anything to me. This might be your last chance."

Lilith chuckled.

"Loving you is a full time job with very little benefits. Poor girl. She just hasn't realized that yet. She tries to act cold, but she's naive."

Her aura flared slowly.

"I've been here before. In all previous timelines, I thought I could make a madman see reason."

She paused.

"I was so wrong."

Damon sat down beside the elixir, a thin smile on his face.

"Oh. I see."

He reached up and removed his crown. The artifact that kept him sane, or at least partially sane. Beneath it, he was still a madman.

But today, the voices in his head were quieter. They only watched.

Damon took a deep breath.

"I wanted to be my truest self when I said this. I was going to write a letter, but you both have good memories."

He cleared his throat dramatically, madness burning in his eyes.

"To everyone I love. You'd be better off."

He looked at them.

"That's all you need to tell them. Take the elixir and give it to my sick sister. Tell her to remember me occasionally, and tell her to move in with my grandfather."

He glanced at Lilith.

"Stay a virgin forever, okay. If you marry someone, I'll haunt you."

She scoffed, then laughed to match his madness.

"Fine. After this, I'll give my chastity to you. Think of it as an apology for what's coming next."

Damon raised his eyebrows as he unfurled the Spear of Death Mutuwa from his back.

Before he could stab himself, Sylvia fired arrows. Lilith teleported and kicked the spear away. It clattered onto a distant pillar.

Damon raised his head, madness burning openly now.

He was calm.

Cold.

"I hope you know the two of you can't take me in a fight anymore."

Lilith's green eyes flashed.

"Try me."

Chapter 882: No Gods Under The Heavens

Being a god was difficult, especially if it was not a path chosen for oneself.

Lazarak was born a god. He had no say in it. One moment he did not exist, and the next he simply was.

His nature came with him. He never chose to be good or evil, never chose which path to walk or which flaws to bear.

His nature decided. It was set in stone against his will.

This reminded him of Damon's belief.

'We are not asked to be born'

Yet as he gazed upon the altars of war scattered across the land, Lazarak felt gratitude.

He was glad he had been born a peaceful god. He was thankful that his nature did not demand conquest or bloodshed.

Sometimes he wondered why the Goddess of Doom would create a god of peace in a world drowning in war.

Of all things, he was older. He was first.

Peace was older than war.

Lazarak hated how peace had become the justification for war.

He was tired. Deeply tired.

Why could the world not simply rest.

The problem was simple.

The solution was not.

The pillar.

"Are you already tired, traitor god."

The voice of Seraph Null echoed through him.

The mass of darkness that formed Lazarak's body had shrunk from the constant damage he had endured. Yet Seraph Null was no better. Of his nine wings, Lazarak had torn away five, leaving the lesser god with only four.

"You are faring no better. If anything, while I am not trying to kill you, you are trying very hard to kill me."

Lazarak did not believe in taking lives. It was his way of remaining pure, untouched by war.

Far below them, the battle raged. Cries of pain. Screams of terror.

"You have disappointed your brother, traitor god. Then again, what could I expect from a weakling god."

Seraph Null roared as his wings slammed into the mass of darkness, the shadow spreading across the sky.

The halo bound to his chained body radiated light, making him appear holy.

Lazarak stared at him.

"Disappointed him. I am the older sibling. I should be the one disappointed. Is he still a slave to war."

Seraph Null's wings strained as an astral wind tore free. Space fractured, spatial cracks tearing open as he ascended, dragging Lazarak higher with him until they reached the upper atmosphere, where a barrier separated the world from the void of stars beyond.

"War is his nature, as prison is mine. Your obsession with peace is yours. If he is a slave, then so are you."

Lazarak split himself, darkness reshaping into a massive dragon, serpentine and vast, with two enormous wings. The dragon bit into Seraph Null's wings.

Seraph Null raised his hand.

"Stop."

Lazarak's form slowed, as though unseen chains bound him. He tore free of the authority, but Seraph Null slashed downward, cleaving his wings. Darkness spilled from Lazarak's body.

The black mass fell.

Godblood struck the world.

Where it rained, the land was forever ruined. Those touched by it collapsed, writhing as their bodies twisted, warped, and burst apart.

"Jahahaha."

Seraph Null laughed.

"It can now be said that you killed them."

Lazarak looked down as his darkness reformed.

Seraph Null rose higher, chains clinking together.

"You always say you do not kill, yet you are always complicit. Tell me, your rebellion. How many lives did you think were lost. You may not raise your hand personally, but that does not mean death does not follow you."

Lazarak was silent.

Seraph Null's wings beat slowly.

"You are a coward. Not because you refuse to kill, but because you let others do your dirty work. I have fought in countless battles. I have crossed many lines. But I can still stand and say that I, Seraph Null, have fought. And if I die, I will die with the dignity of a god who worshiped war."

Chains formed triangular seals as he pointed at Lazarak.

"And then there is you. Look around you. This is all your fault. You cannot take a life, yet you still bring death. Is that not right, god of repose."

Lazarak had no mouth, yet the words left a bitter taste.

"You are right. I am a coward. And all this death is on me."

His form began to shift.

"I am a failure. I cannot protect anything. I am complicit. I have always known that. But it does not change what must be done. Perhaps I cannot act. But I no longer need to."

His form condensed, reshaping into that of a man.

"I have seen those who will shape this world. Those who will make history. You may believe gods will rule forever, but this is mankind's world. Down there, the children of man are carving their future."

Lazarak was no longer needed.

He had seen Lyn and Sithara. Those two would change the world with their ideas and their genius. They would leave this lower realm and return to Aetherus. They would found a great city of knowledge and teach generations to come.

He had seen Damon.

No matter how many times he fell, he would rise and move forward.

He had seen Damon's companions too.

Each of them was a star.

A single star shining within a vast abyss.

"You are watching too, aren't you."

Lazarak raised his hand. Massive chains of darkness ascended into the sky. When they passed beyond the firmament, they latched onto the heavens themselves.

Seraph Null froze.

"What is that. A spell."

He stared at Lazarak.

"You cannot hope to defeat me with this."

Lazarak grasped the chains bound to the heavens.

"The era of gods has ended, Seraph Null. We have entered the golden age of the mortal races."

He pulled.

Terror flooded Seraph Null's eyes as the heavens began to descend.

Lazarak's cold voice echoed.

"I will bring down the heavens for mankind, so they may touch the clouds."

"This is my spell."

The heavens moved.

"No gods under the heavens"

The clouds, the sky itself, were dragged down toward the earth.

Chapter 883: Curse

Blood dripped from the side of his head. From the look of things, he was being physically abused, violently so.

It felt like the two of them were trying to kill him before he could kill himself.

He held a sword in one hand and a ball of flames in the other.

They were not faring much better. Their hair was disheveled, and Sylvia had a deep cut across her shoulder.

"You two are not serious about this. Look, I am not even pissed that you are trying to stop me. In fact, I think it is perfectly reasonable. But—"

He paused as the flames condensed, crystallizing into frost. A chilling cold spread in the air.

Frost dominate

"I cannot let you do that."

Ice shot forward, coiling and freezing everything in its path. Its hard cracking sounds echoed out.

Lilith waved her hand, slicing the ice apart effortlessly. She glanced at him.

"You are right. One thing I had to admit to myself is this. You have grown, Damon. You are stronger than before. If I fought you alone, I would lose. Even if I fought fair, I would still lose."

Damon frowned. He knew he had grown stronger, but the look on Lilith's face filled him with unease.

"That is why I never planned to."

She glanced at Sylvia, who was staring at the Unknown God's Journey book.

"If we stop you today, can we stop you tomorrow."

Her voice was calm.

"It would be exhausting. So we chose another option."

Damon did not feel his danger sense flare, but his intuition screamed that something had gone terribly wrong.

The mental apparition in the back of his mind wore a tense expression.

As soon as Lilith finished speaking, Damon took a deep breath.

"Oh shit."

His movement halted.

A magic circle spread beneath his feet, spanning the entire room. It glowed white, etched with countless runes he had never seen before. At its center, directly beneath him, was the symbol of the Unknown God.

Damon stepped forward.

The center of the circle moved with him.

"Hm. What is this? A spell."

Sylvia finally spoke, shaking her head as she bit her lip hard enough to draw blood.

"No. It is a curse."

Damon raised his eyebrows. He felt no pain. The magic did not burn or crush him.

It felt as though it had locked onto him.

"A curse. How so."

Sylvia knew he was buying time. They were doing the same.

"It is a curse that harms you. It creates an artificial desire to live within your heart and forces you to take actions to preserve your life. The curse will only break when you learn how to truly live."

A grim realization settled over Damon.

"So this is an actual death sentence. No. Worse. It is a ticket to misery."

His voice was calm, analytical.

"A curse depends on its target. If you curse a fat man to be fat, it means nothing. But curse a muscular man to become fat, and that becomes suffering."

His eyes lifted.

"It is only a curse if it imposes misery on the one it targets. And this is truly a dire curse for me."

He raised his head and laughed, madness spilling freely.

"Spectacular. Truly spectacular. You went out of your way to make me suffer. This is a magnificent curse."

He was not angry. With his crown cast aside, he was already mad.

This curse was lethal to Damon because of his Deathless skill.

Skill: [Deathless]

The more you desire your own death, the more improbable events occur to prevent it. Death will come only when you least desire it.

The skill had made Damon practically immortal. No matter how reckless he became, fate bent itself to keep him alive.

Because Damon wanted to die.

If the curse took effect, his desire would invert.

He would want to live.

And Deathless would stop protecting him.

Instead, it would hurl every improbable fatal event directly at him.

Living would become hell mode.

No. Worse.

He could slip on a banana peel, tumble down a staircase, collide with a maid carrying a vat of acid, fall into it, survive, only for the building to collapse, ignite, flood, and sweep him into the ocean, where a leviathan would swallow him whole. After a week inside its stomach, it would fail to digest him and expel him into the sea, directly into a mana anomaly.

He cut the thought off.

The fact remained.

If this curse worked, his life would become one prolonged attempt to kill him.

Damon looked at Sylvia and smiled softly.

"What price did you pay for this curse?"

She met his gaze, sorrow etched deep into her expression.

"If you are asking how much I paid for the spell, you will be glad to know the Unknown God gave it to me for free."

Damon nodded slowly.

"I see. He must really want me alive for whatever plan he has."

He turned to Lilith.

"But he never gives anything for free. Casting this must have a cost."

Lilith nodded as she and Sylvia began channeling the spell.

"It requires the deaths of thousands, which you so conveniently provided with the war outside. The life of one god. And half of our lifespans."

She looked at him coldly.

"Congratulations, Damon. Your survival is expensive. Now you know how much your life is worth."

Damon nodded. He understood the structure of the curse.

It was not complete yet.

Seraph Null still had to die.

No wonder the Unknown God had engineered this nightmare. He needed a god as fuel.

Damon smiled faintly.

"That is all well and good. But the curse is not finished. As long as I kill myself before you complete it, I win."

He vanished, teleporting toward the spear.

Lilith waved her hand, and the spear disappeared, reappearing in her grasp.

It was the only weapon capable of killing him.

He could try other methods.

But Deathless would ensure he survived.

Chapter 884: Less Than A Passing Thought

"Maggots, all of them lowly maggots." His voice was calm and cold. There was an indifference in his tone that showed just how lowly he saw the entities before him.

He stood on a burning building, the flames rolling and snapping around his feet, yet they did not seem to bother him in the slightest. Fire washed over the stone beneath him, heat distorting the air, but his posture never changed.

How could lower realm flames bother him?

His form was small. No surprise there. It was the body of a little girl with short black hair. She wore a small dress that reached her knees, clean and well made, and from how neatly she was dressed it was clear her parents must have held some significance.

But her eyes were dark.

These eyes did not belong to her anymore.

"What a hassle. A noble nightmare such as I, trapped in another nightmare."

The voice was the voice of Ittorath as he observed the proceedings below, his gaze heavy with disdain.

After escaping through the Lake of Tears and coming into this world, he had been met with disappointment. This place was nothing more than a dream.

Ittorath carried the same disdain he always held for lower realm creatures.

Nothing about them was sophisticated. Their magic was flimsy. Their alchemy was trash. Their understanding of cultivation and comprehension of the Dao was nonexistent.

How Ittorath felt was similar to how someone from a vast city might feel upon discovering a rural village. No, worse. It was like finding an uncontacted island populated by savage natives.

"Savages. They are savages." His face scrunched up in genuine disgust, his lips curling as if the very sight offended him.

He was not wrong.

The world of Aetherus had many prohibitions and restrictions, far more than most lower realm worlds. For one, the sky itself was sealed away by the Goddess of Doom. Ittorath's true body in Lysithara could still sense her power covering the world like an invisible shroud.

He opened his eyes slowly.

He had come into this world through the Metaverse, with some help from that wretched ant who called himself Mugu.

Everyone had their agenda for coming here. Some wanted power and believed they would achieve grand comprehension of the heavens and attain the Dao.

That was mostly cultivators, like the blind old Daoist.

Then there were those who thought the Goddess had hidden the secret of Akasha here, and others who believed Ataraxia could be achieved within this world.

Of course, all these old monsters knew it was a stretch, but they came anyway. One way or another, there would be a great treasure here. Something that might help them reach a new rank.

More than that, someone had been spreading rumors about the secret of the True Beings.

The risk was small. After all, this was a mere lower realm. And more than three hundred thousand years had passed within this world, sealed away and imprisoned.

No matter.

That was not a particularly long time.

Not much time had passed where they came from.

Though Ittorath came here for a different reason. He had been hoping for something.

He acted cruelly, sought out the prize more relentlessly than anyone else, not because the prize mattered to him, but because this was a chance.

This was his chance to earn the favor of his creator, the Unknown God.

"I am but a wisp of His nightmare."

Even if the Unknown God knew he existed, Ittorath was too small and insignificant. Less than an ant. Not even equivalent to a passing thought.

The Unknown God would never care.

He raised his hand to the sky as Lazarak and Seraph Null battled above, divine power tearing through the heavens.

"If only I could be graced by your magnificent voice just once. Just once, and I would be fulfilled until the end of time. My god."

Of course, that was merely a fantasy.

The Unknown God would never answer.

"Ittorath."

A voice called out inside his mind.

Ittorath sighed, his shoulders lowering slightly. He had dreamed of this for so long that he was already hallucinating.

"Ittorath."

The voice called again.

The little girl's eyes widened. Her face suddenly paled, color draining from her skin.

This voice.

Ittorath knew it too well.

This was the voice from whose nightmares he was born.

It was different from what he remembered, deeper and heavier, but this was undoubtedly the Unknown God.

His knees buckled as he fell to the ground, collapsing onto them as his heart felt like it was about to explode with joy.

"My... my god. You have not forsaken me."

Somewhere far away, in a place that seemed like the inside of a house, a figure with silver hair held a book, his expression hidden behind its pages.

Then he smiled faintly as he muttered,

'It was a calculated step. Giving him fate manipulation resistance and the Deathless skill created an impressive paradox. One I can exploit.'

Within the pages of the book, everything was written. The battle between Lazarak and Seraph Null. Damon fighting Sylvia and Lilith. Everything.

Including Ittorath kneeling in reverence.

All of it was part of what he was writing, and if he did not like it, like editing a novel, he could change it all.

Authority. Dream Maker.

'A dream was still reality, but one without witnesses. And when the lone observer woke, it ceased to be. What is not observed is forgotten, and what is forgotten belongs to Oblivion, the devourer of dreams.'

Naturally, he could not do this in the world ruled by the Goddess of Doom, so he had to lure them into a nightmare he created here, where he was able to use his absolute power without another absolute god interfering.

The theory behind it was simple.

It was not because he was weaker, or because Doom was stronger.

What happens when an immovable object meets an unstoppable force.

The omniverse itself would break as easily as glass before a conclusion could be reached, reducing them to nothing more than two children in a schoolyard playing make-believe, where the rules were whatever they decided them to be.

Thus came the need for obedience to the No Absolute Accord, and why gods limited themselves to certain rules.

Of course, with rules came loopholes.

And schemes.

"I call you, Ittorath. Hear me."

Ittorath trembled violently, unable to tell whether it was joy or overwhelming fear that shook him as he faced the Demon God himself.

"I am able, willing, and ready. Unseen Sovereign. God of the Abyss. This lowly nightmare humbles himself before the God of Dreams."

The Unknown God gave him a task.

With its completion came the promise of a boon.

Ittorath felt as if his heart would burst.

Then the presence vanished.

He slowly rose to his feet, a smile spreading across his face.

"I shall not fail you."

Chapter 885: Fall Of God

He had a deep gash along his side, blood pooling faster than he could stop it.

His breathing was heavy. Half of the pillars in the white room were gone, shattered completely, and the walls had collapsed, exposing the outside world.

Both of his newly formed demon horns were broken. He had used them as weapons.

He gasped as the space in front of him folded inward.

Lilith Astranova stood there.

"How many times have you fought me before," she asked coldly. "Figuring out my tactics before I even use them."

Her green eyes remained devoid of warmth.

The magic circle beneath Damon's feet shrank further, guttering like a dying flame. Smaller and smaller it became, while glowing runes began appearing across Damon's body and in Sylvia's hands.

Lilith was the core offensive anchor of the spell.

In her hand, the runes condensed into a cursed tool.

It took the shape of a twisted dagger, radiating white light as symbols flickered across its surface. Within it, Damon could see hundreds of screaming souls writhing beneath the blade.

"This dagger only needs one final sacrifice," Lilith said flatly. "The death of a god."

Damon nodded, then slowly equipped his helm, sealing his face behind it along with his broken horns.

"Fine," he said calmly. "Then I will defeat you before it is finished."

Lilith did not respond.

She simply looked up, her hands slick with blood.

Then the upper region of the tower exploded.

The structure was ripped apart entirely as the outside wind roared in.

Damon raised his head, eyes widening.

He was not the only one who saw it.

Across the battlefield, fighting stopped. Everyone stared upward.

A chain stretched into the heavens, impossibly vast, pulled taut by a massive form of darkness. With every pull, the sky itself descended.

The sun and clouds were falling.

The heavens were being dragged down.

And with them, the gods who fought above.

Seraph Null struggled against the descent, his remaining wings flapping relentlessly as his colossal form tried to force the heavens back upward.

It was futile.

It was like pushing against an invisible wall.

His wings bent and cracked. His chained body groaned under the weight. Blood rained from the sky, and where it touched the earth, the land warped. Flowers of steel and chains bloomed from the soil.

Still, the fall did not stop.

Below, Abellona stood frozen.

"Is this the power of a god."

The heavens crushed everything that stood tall.

The top of the Black Tower shattered, crumbling as the sky was dragged lower and lower by Lazarak's spell.

Until it gave way entirely.

Leaving only the floor where Damon was fighting Lilith and Sylvia, the elixir glowing behind them, shimmering faintly.

Then Seraph Null fell.

With no wings left to carry him and his body battered beyond recognition, his form shrank as he crashed into the tower floor.

Moments later, the mass of darkness that was Lazarak also fell, slamming down as a shapeless tide of shadow.

Darkness spread across the ground, swallowing the space.

On the opposite side, Seraph Null had reverted into a massive ball of chains, nearly ten meters wide.

Damon ignored him.

He rushed toward Lazarak, kneeling beside the writhing darkness.

The shadow gathered, forming a face.

Lazarak smiled weakly.

"I will be fine," he said softly. "This is nothing. Just give me a minute."

Damon nodded.

Then he saw Sylvia and Lilith rushing toward Seraph Null.

Sylvia cast a supporting spell, and Lilith raised her hand.

Void Scythe.

Seraph Null was too weak to move as they approached.

"You dare, mortals," he cried weakly. "Have you gone mad. I am a god. A god."

He tried to inch away as the void gathered.

"How does a mortal wield a skill with a god's authority."

Lilith did not hesitate.

She brought the scythe down.

The space rippled.

Seraph Null trembled as terror consumed his inhuman form.

"You mortal," he gasped. "If I die, this world dies with me."

Lilith looked at him coldly, then raised the dagger forged from the spell.

"I do not care what happens to the likes of you."

She plunged the dagger into the chains.

Seraph Null's soul was drawn out, absorbed screaming into the blade.

Lilith collapsed to her knees as her lifespan began to drain, half of it flowing into the dagger.

Sylvia fared no better. Half of her life was taken as well. She coughed blood and nearly fell before gripping Lilith's shoulder.

"I," she whispered. "Are you sure you want to do this?"

Lilith turned, glancing toward Damon who was standing still covered in his own blood.

Runes gathered and condensed over his chest.

"He is giving me no choice," she said quietly. "I am not going to stand there and let him die."

She couldn't just let him die again.

Sylvia closed her eyes, then nodded.

"One cut," she said. "If you cut him even once, the curse will take effect."

Damon heard it.

She was speaking to him as well.

He could hear the hesitation in her voice.

"I cannot do this," Sylvia muttered, biting her lip. "You are right. I am inferior to you. So I will not."

His entire life had been spent surviving. She could not condemn him to something even worse.

She wanted him to live but not like this.

Lilith stepped forward.

"Then I will do it alone."

Outside, the world shook.

The earth cracked. Rivers turned to blood. Plants withered. Mana anomalies tore into the land.

The god of this world was dead.

So was its order.

The chained people fell to their knees as their bindings vanished. Their god was gone.

Their world was dying.

In the distance, reality itself began to erode.

But to the people of Damon's world, none of that mattered.

Someone raised a trembling hand and pointed.

"The elixir of pseudo immortality. It is real."

Chaos erupted instantly.

Some charged the tower.

Others blasted them down with magic.

With the enemy gone, the war resumed.

Not for survival.

But for greed.

Chapter 886: Those For Or Against

Damon merely gave her a resigned smile. She hated that smile. She hated how he was looking at her at this moment.

She would have been able to accept it if he were angry. If he unleashed all his power. But instead, he gave her that same tired, resigned look, and it made her feel unbearably frustrated.

The twisted dagger in her hand felt cold, even though it was not an actual object. It was a magical construct carrying the souls of thousands of mortals... and one god.

This should have been over. This nightmare should have ended, but it had not.

Seraph Null was dead. They had won. It was over.

Lilith was tired. She was hurt. And she... she was afraid.

She was not so sure anymore. This was the one thing she could do. This was the only answer she had certainty in.

'I just want us to go back home together...'

That was the only thought in her heart.

She just wanted to go back with him. To Luna and Iris. She wanted to return to the days they spent at Iris's house, with Matia standing in the garden, making snowmen with Luna.

With Lilith sipping tea and arguing with Renata.

The days when Damon would stop being a half-assed teacher and actually train Iris.

That was all she wanted. It was not much. Not right now.

She clenched her teeth until they bled.

Lilith did not care about taking on the world. She did not care about the Goddess of Doom. She did not care about destroying the temple.

She just wanted to go back home and reclaim what normal meant to her.

There was nothing wrong with that.

Then why was the one person who should have understood standing against her.

Why was he so obsessed with ending his own life?

Boom.

She left an afterimage as she dashed toward him. The ground cracked. Damon raised his sword in a single swing, his blade colliding with the dagger as sparks exploded in all directions. Astral winds surged outward, hurling debris across the collapsing space.

Around them, the world was slowly unraveling due to the death of its god. It was now a godless world.

Even so, even as chaos spread, all they could see was each other.

Lilith felt so frustrated.

"Why... why are you looking at me like that," she screamed, abandoning all of her usual calm and composure. Her voice tore through the chamber.

Damon did not look away.

Then he whispered, "Because... you're crying."

His voice was so low she almost did not hear it. And in that moment, she felt it. The warmth on her cheeks.

It was not blood.

It was tears.

She raised her hand, splitting the space between them. The world seemed to bleed as mana grew even more chaotic. Spatial rifts formed, and strange monstrous eyes peered in from the void, eager to devour a world without a god.

"I... I... I don't know," she said, swiping the dagger at him.

"I do," Damon replied.

Of all the times, of all the reasons, he could not feel angry or betrayed.

He never imagined anyone would fight this desperately just to preserve his lowly life.

But seeing someone go so far for him—

She was haggard. Covered in blood. Tears streamed from her eyes. She was exhausted, but she was still fighting.

"For... me..."

Damon's hands went weak when he tried to strike her. She kicked him back instead.

He stopped looking at her.

When was the last time he had actually talked to her. Really talked to her.

"I... I'm sorry, Lilith. For everything."

She froze.

Just for a moment.

"I'm not going to fight you anymore," he continued quietly. "I'm just so tired... of all the fighting. Fighting is what turned me into... into this."

He slowly turned his back to her and began walking toward the spear behind him.

This was her opening.

Lilith did not miss it.

Without hesitation, she charged at Damon, dagger in hand.

...

Swords were drawn, and it became difficult to distinguish friend from foe.

Abellona and Damon's friends reached the doors of the tower with ease.

Standing before them was a single female knight, her armor seemingly forged from shattered ice.

When they arrived, she turned her sword toward them, her face hidden beneath her helm.

"I'm afraid I cannot let you pass."

Evangeline, drenched in blood after killing the Wind Apostle on her own, stepped forward.

"What are you doing, Matia? We have to go. Damon and Sylvia might need help."

Matia shook her head.

"I cannot let you pass."

Xander frowned. Something was wrong.

Leona's eyes narrowed.

"You're awfully chatty today. What's happening."

That was it.

Matia was not the type to speak this much. Not since they returned from Lysithara. She was a taciturn knight.

Matia paused, then pointed her sword again.

"My lord is about to end his suffering in this mortal plane. I cannot let you interfere."

There was pain in her voice.

Evangeline nodded slowly.

"I see. So that's what's going on."

She understood.

Matia was loyal to Damon. That was her honor as a knight. She would not go against his wish. Even if she did not want him to die, she could not stop it if it was his decision.

That was why she told them instead.

If they defeated her and entered the Black Tower, they could stop Damon's suicide.

Talking was pointless.

Evangeline drew her sword.

"Thank you. I'll be sure to talk some sense into that bastard."

Beneath her helm, Matia smiled.

Before they could move, a faceless figure appeared behind them.

"None shall pass."

Xander heard the voice. His expression went cold.

He turned around, filled with hatred, staring at the entity that had killed his brother in cold blood.

"Amon."

Brandishing his spear, he stepped forward. Emilia Highgon took a deep breath and followed him.

"You guys go stop that son of a bitch. I'll deal with Amon."

Matia slowly raised her sword. Ice spread from her wings, freezing the air.

"Apologies. While I wish for you to pass, I shan't allow it."

A line of ice appeared around the door. Her wings unleashed an area of absolute winter.

"Whoever steps forward shall die."

Someone was foolish enough to try.

An adventurer, greedy for the elixir, rushed forward.

He made it past her.

Then his body hit the ground.

Along with his head.

Evangeline clenched her teeth.

"You can't hope to take us all together. Even you aren't that powerful."

A young woman with violet hair stepped forward.

"Who said she was alone?"

Chapter 887: Choice Was An Illusion

Renata showed up with a thin smile on her face, blood streaking across her features, though none of it was her own.

She glanced at Xander, who was standing face to face with Amon, who was just Damon's shadow clone.

This particular iteration did not seem too powerful, so she figured Damon had not put much effort into it.

She stepped beside Matia and glanced at the others.

"Well then... shall we?"

Abellona frowned, tightening her grip on her spear.

"Why are you getting in the way?"

Renata sighed, her expression calm.

"I may not be a knight, but I am someone who can respect his decision. This world is shit anyway."

Evangeline's eyes grew cold, murderous intent leaking out.

"Move."

Renata chuckled.

"Someone's getting fired up. You underclassmen may have had one great adventure in Lysithara and come back overpowered, but your upperclassmen are still in a whole other league."

Evangeline's eyes glowed gold.

"Time to find out."

She flashed forward in a beam of light. An explosion of radiance spread in all directions. Renata raised her hand, a barrier forming as it reduced the power of the attack.

Matia followed up with an ice strike that nearly impaled Evangeline. Lightning sparked as Leona blasted it away with her sword.

"Argh!" Leona charged at Matia, knowing that if she held back, she could die.

Ice and lightning collided, forming a raging storm. Many charged at Matia, but she did not even move. She spread her wings, cold winds filling the air as visibility dropped to nothing.

...

Xander stared at Amon with killing intent, circling him slowly, his expression cold.

Emilia Highgon prepared a spell, glowing magic seals forming in her hands.

Amon—or rather Damon—was tired as he glanced at the shadow drones.

"Kill anyone who tries to get into the tower."

The shadow drones turned, weapons raised, and joined the battle for the tower.

He then turned to Bakemon Baal, leader of the Demon Heirs.

"You too."

Bakemon grit his teeth, his face smeared with blood.

"My lord, we have a truce with them. I signed a contract. We can't kill them."

Right. Abellona had made them sign a mutual contract.

Damon nodded.

"Then stop them within the limits of your contract."

As soon as he said that—

"Amon wants the elixir! We can't let him have it!" someone screamed from the crowd, and they all took battle formations to deal with the invading drones.

The sky above hung low due to Lazarak's spell, its colors slowly changing.

Damon could feel the natural laws unraveling. Gravity was fading. The atmosphere was dying. Everything that made up the world was collapsing into itself.

Xander leapt into the air and swung his spear downward.

"That's your opening move? How predictable."

He raised his hand and punched toward the spear, ice coating his fist.

Emilia launched her attack, but he dodged easily.

...

He did not turn around, even though he knew she was charging at him. He picked up the spear.

And turned.

Boom.

A sonic boom shook the air. The dagger rested against his chest—

Just inches away.

"Why... why aren't you trying to stop me?"

"Why aren't you trying to fight for your life?"

"Why won't you just... live?"

"Why won't my words reach you?"

"Why is my love not enough?"

"Why am I... not enough?"

"Why don't you love me?"

Damon smiled slowly. He reached for her hand and gently took the dagger from her grasp, tossing it aside where it clanged against the ground.

She fell to her knees.

He knelt before her, holding her in his arms.

He lifted her head and wiped the tears from her face.

"I'm not stopping you because I know your love is not coercion."

"I'm not fighting because I chose to stop. This is my choice."

"I am tired," he answered her third question softly.

"Your words reached me... but I can't choose not to try. I'll never know if I don't. I wish to know if I truly had a choice, if I was truly free or if my choices were just illusions created by an all-powerful god."

Then came her fifth question.

The answer was simple.

"It's everything to me"

He rested his forehead against hers.

"You are plenty."

He kissed her.

"I do. I love you."

Her eyes widened, but her tears would not stop. Sylvia lowered her head, tears falling freely.

Damon tightened his grip on the spear, ready to drive it into his chest.

"Ugh. Disgusting monkeys"

Damon turned his head slightly.

A girl stood right beside him.

He had not even sensed her.

In that same instant, she drove the dagger into his chest. The motion was quick and fluid.

Lilith's eyes widened in horror as the dagger dissolved inside Damon's chest, transforming into countless runes that spread across his body. He collapsed to the ground, writhing in agony as his heart was modified by the curse.

His desire for death inverted into an intense, overwhelming will to survive.

It was like the feeling he had when he first left his village—

Only a thousand times stronger.

He had to survive at all costs.

That was all that mattered.

In his chest, a scar-like imprint appeared then it faded.

Lilith stood frozen in shock.

So did Sylvia.

She had not noticed the girl at all. One moment she was not there, and the next, she was, as if some all-powerful author had decided she needed to be there at that exact moment.

Lilith did not ask questions.

She attacked.

The girl casually grabbed her arm and broke it, kicking her aside.

Then she glanced down with disdain.

"Don't touch me, you lowly savage who couldn't even complete such a basic task."

And just like that, the girl turned and walked away, heading toward the exit as if nothing else here mattered.

Sylvia's eyes widened. She raised her bow and fired an arrow at the girl.

"Who... who are you."

The girl paused, glancing at the armor Sylvia wore.

Her voice was cold.

"Ah. I see. You're the one who inherited Valacara's ascendant armor. I'll make sure you suffer before you die, alongside that golden bitch who inherited Valarie Sunwarden's armor."

Sylvia's hand trembled. For whatever reason, only one name surfaced in her mind.

"Y... you. You're Ittorath... aren't you."

Ittorath glanced at Damon, who had pushed himself up, staring at her with fury.

The world did not end. Damon did not die. And that terrified him more than anything else.

She chuckled.

"I see not all you monkeys are stupid."

Her gaze settled on Damon. Then she looked at the half withered flower in her hand.

Lilith quickly touched her hair. Ittorath had taken the gardenia the unknown god had given her.

"Farewell. My god has great plans for you."

And just like that—

She disappeared.

## Chapter 888: Remember Me

The sky was now a chaotic storm, rain falling, snow descending, and the sun still blazing hot.

The world no longer followed any rules that made sense. God was dead, and with him, order.

Before this chaos became familiar, many would die. Even so, life would persist. It was built to do so, even in a broken world.

Maybe someday, in a far-off future, a new god would rise and order would be restored.

Until then...

Damon held the vial, the elixir of pseudo-immortality, in his hands. It had shrunk into a small bottle, glowing and shimmering as he looked down at the battle below. It was over now. Everyone had stopped fighting.

They were all staring at the chaos approaching in the distance.

The world was folding in on itself. A deadly stream of broken space surged outward in all directions, casting everything it touched into the void.

Damon could see it.

They would all die with this world.

It was ironic, wasn't it?

He glanced at the spear in his hand. In one hand, he held death given physical form. In the other, the elixir he had searched for all these years.

He stood at the crossroads of life and death.

And yet, he had been given no choice.

Sylvia gritted her teeth as she ran up to him.

"The gate leading back home is gone. It was on the upper floors of the tower, but it's been destroyed."

She took a deep breath.

"Even if we found it, we would be sent back epochs before our time. We... are trapped."

Damon was in a daze. Death was coming, yet all his thoughts were driven toward survival.

He turned to Sylvia.

"Can you gather the parts of the gate? Try to reassemble it before that storm reaches us."

She bit her lip, then nodded, leaving him alone.

The world was breaking apart. He could see the land being eaten away by the void.

Soft footsteps sounded behind him.

He didn't turn around.

Damon spoke, his gaze fixed on two children flying on the back of a wyvern-like creature, their eyes locked on him and Lazarak.

"You knew this was going to happen, didn't you."

Lazarak was silent for a moment as he limped over.

He wore a resigned smile.

"I didn't know how. I just knew it was not your fate to die here today, my friend."

Damon smiled softly, a self-deprecating smile.

"I knew... I knew from the beginning. I could not escape the hands of fate. Fate is just our choices, but the Unknown God, he takes away all other choices except the one he wants. In the end, he decides..."

He sat beside Lazarak, taking in the ambience of annihilation.

"The Goddess of Doom or the Unknown God, there is no lesser evil. They are both gods down to their core. And what happens to us lowly mortals? Our choices don't matter..."

He sighed, letting out a small laugh.

Lazarak remained quiet as Damon spoke.

"I understand now why you fought so hard. You weren't like me, someone trying to run from the system. You actually tried to fight it."

Damon bit his lip, his eyes cold.

"He wants me to live? Fine. I will. But I'm breaking out of this whole system. This world has been played by Doom and the Unknown for too long. I'm breaking out of their system."

"If I can't die, then I will end the system that prevents it."

Lazarak smiled as he looked at the annihilating storm.

"If that's the case, then you know what you must do."

Damon's eyes watered. His hand trembled.

"I... I don't know if I'm strong enough to do that."

Lazarak smiled at him, his long hair falling softly.

"I had an epiphany while fighting Seraph Null. Do mortals truly need gods or do gods need mortals?"

He placed a hand on Damon's shoulder.

"Even the almighty true gods who claim they don't need faith still have believers. Even this Unknown God, who doesn't want to be worshipped, still lives in the hearts of mortals."

Damon had told Lazarak many things about the Unknown God.

"I am a god, but do I truly live if I am not in the hearts of mortals?"

Damon shook his head.

"I can't... I can't do it."

Lazarak shifted slightly, looking at Damon, who remained seated.

"You can."

Damon looked down. The world felt suddenly silent.

He saw people pointing at him or rather, at the elixir in his hand. He saw greed in their faces. All of them. Even as the world was breaking, they still wanted it.

Yet Damon couldn't bring himself to care.

His heart felt heavy. A single tear fell.

This hurt more than losing his right to die of his own volition.

"Will you do this for me," Lazarak whispered.

Because he knew there was no other way.

And even if Damon resisted, the curse would have forced this choice upon him.

This was the only path to survival.

"Victory is an endless nightmare, and defeat is the moment of wake."

Damon chuckled, tears falling freely.

"Damn you, Unknown. Damn you..."

Lazarak smiled softly. He raised Damon's hand and guided it to the spear resting in his lap.

Lazarak had forged this spear from a single strand of hair that had fallen from the Goddess of Doom.

It was death made physical.

A fitting choice.

He lifted Damon's hand and pressed the spear to his own heart.

"You know... I was really lonely. All that time alone. I talked to myself so I wouldn't go mad... but I couldn't afford to die either."

He smiled, pressing the tip into his chest.

"But more than anything, I was afraid. I wasn't a particularly famous god. Not many cared about me. With each day that passed, I was afraid... that I would be forgotten."

He stood, forcing Damon to rise with him.

"A god is only truly dead when they are forgotten, when they no longer live in anyone's heart."

Damon gritted his teeth, shaking his head.

"I can't..."

"Our time together was short, but every moment was worth a lifetime."

"Do not think of your life as a curse. Think of it as an opportunity, not to mourn what you've lost, but to celebrate what you still have."

Damon closed his eyes. His teeth clenched as he pushed the spear forward.

He felt it crush through his ribs.

The sinking sensation as it pierced Lazarak's heart.

Lazarak fell to his knees, smiling.

"I don't mind being forgotten anymore... but I am still scared no one will remember me. Still, let me give you something to remember me by."

A small spark was pulled from his heart.

He looked at Damon one last time. Blood flowed along his palms as he reached out, and the tiny spark flew into Damon's chest.

"Remember me, Damon... remember that a small god of darkness like me existed... remember me."

Those were the final words of Lazarak, God of Darkness, Peace, Serenity, and Repose.

The conclusion of his nightmare.

[You have slain Lazarak, God of Darkness]

[You have gained Lazarak's Divine Spark]

[Quest: Nightmare of Lazarak]

[Completed]

[The Unknown God watches]

Chapter 889: A Paradox With Beginning

Lazarak was gone.

It was as if the world had fallen silent for a moment. Damon could still see the smile on Lazarak's face as he faded, his body turning into small black particles that dissolved into the aether.

[You have gained: Book of Shadows]

System chimes continued to ring, but Damon remained frozen in a daze.

Lyn and Sithara guided the wyvern-like shadow drone down to him and dismounted, rushing to where Lazarak had stood only moments ago.

But he was gone.

Sithara's face slowly reddened before she collapsed to her knees, sobbing openly. Lyn's hands trembled as he stood beside her, his jaw clenched as he struggled to hide the tears slipping down his face.

Damon slowly raised his arms and opened them.

When the children saw the gesture, they ran to him and clung to his chest, crying without restraint.

He gently stroked their heads.

He could feel his body slowly turning white. Not just him, but everyone who had come into this world with him.

The nightmare was over.

It was time to wake.

Damon took a deep breath.

"Hey... you two... listen to me..."

They slowly lifted their heads to look at him.

"I'm sorry we couldn't create Lysithara together," he said, beginning with an apology.

"You might not even know I existed after this. After all, this was only a fleeting dream... even so..."

He bit his lip, forcing the pain in his chest back down.

"You two can do it. I have faith. Not in any gods... but in the both of you."

Their eyes remained fixed on Damon, who was slowly fading away.

"Don't go... Damon... don't leave..." Sithara cried softly.

Damon shook his head.

"I'm not leaving. I'm right here."

He reached out and touched their hearts, the same way Lazarak had touched his before he died.

"One of the greatest people I ever knew told me to create something beautiful. So I want to ask you two to do the same... for me."

"Create something beautiful."

Sithara's hands trembled.

"The era of gods has come to an end. This is the epoch of man. Show me something beautiful. Who knows, maybe one day in the future I'll see it and be awed by beauty that can withstand the testament of time."

Lyn nodded.

"I promise."

Sithara wiped her tears.

"I promise."

Damon smiled and nodded.

He held the elixir in his hand. This too was a reward from the quest. The primary reason he had come here.

And yet he was leaving more changed, more scarred, and perhaps even more hopeful than before.

His body turned into sparks.

This was not a real world. It was only a dream, a nightmare.

The clues had always been there, even in its name.

The Unknown God loved riddles.

And this one was simple.

The nightmare was called The Nightmare of Lazarak.

Victory was an endless nightmare, and defeat was the moment of wake.

That was the answer.

As long as Lazarak remained victorious, as long as he continued winning, he would never wake. He would continue dreaming, and as long as he dreamed, no one else could wake.

But defeat was the moment of wake.

If Lazarak died, he would awaken, and the dream would cease to exist.

Damon realized this when Seraph Null's death did not end everything.

This was never about objectives.

Lazarak simply had to die.

Everything from the beginning had been guiding events toward that conclusion.

This nightmare was a copy of real history from the Zero Epoch.

In reality, Lazarak had broken out on his own and returned to the real world. When he did, Lazarak won. He created the Tomb of Lesser Gods and brought forth the Unknown God.

He was the catalyst to everything.

He was the main character of the Zero Epoch.

From him, the next era began.

Lyn and Sithara created Lysithara sometime after the fall of the gods, which led to the events of the First Epoch, when Mugu and the Ascendant brought forth the Outsiders.

Which led to everything else.

Damon wondered if the future affected the past as much as the past affected the future.

...

In a dark prison forgotten by all, massive chains bound a sealed mass of darkness.

It opened its eyes.

"Hmm. I just had the strangest dream. You won't believe what I dreamt about."

Lazarak glanced toward the altar where someone should have been.

But no one was there.

It was just a dream.

The darkness shifted and murmured.

He did not remember what the dream had been about, only that in his dream he believed he had a friend.

The mass of darkness compressed and reshaped itself until it became a dark-haired toddler.

He smiled.

"No point waiting. Aetherus, I'm coming."

He pulled against the chains until they snapped. He glanced at the cocoon resting in the corner and took it with him as he broke out of Eidolon, the imaginary prison.

This time, he did it alone.

There was no one by his side.

Eventually, after many trials, nothing could break him. He carried his fears on his back, and whenever he felt close to shattering, he would think fondly of a dream he could not remember.

And he would persevere.

His heart full.

When he finally escaped, he encountered two eccentric children who felt strangely familiar, as if he had known them for a long time.

They followed Lazarak as he challenged Seraph Null, breaking out of his world and reaching Aetherus.

Years passed.

Lazarak succeeded in his goal, but he perished. Where he died, a swirling abyss formed, and with it came the influence of a new god.

The era of gods ended with a god no one remembered.

All gods were sealed within a tomb, bound by three keys.

Each key was dedicated to someone Lazarak cared about.

The first key was for a friend he had never met and whose name he did not know.

The second key was for Lyn.

The third key was for Sithara.

That marked the end of the era.

With his final battle, the order of the world was changed.

A new city rose, a place of learning where everyone was welcome.

Lysithara.

In Lysithara, a young girl with golden hair had just won a match against several boys. She laughed as they wore sour expressions, forced to accept her dominance.

She laughed freely as a boy her age ran toward her, pale-faced.

"Valarie, there you are. I've been looking all over for you."

He grabbed her hand, his expression serious.

"Ah!" she squealed. "Vathren, stop pulling me. I didn't beat them up."

He bit his lip.

"We have to go. The elder is about to pass. She wants to see us."

Valarie paled and followed him.

The elder Sithara was a wise woman, founder of Lysithara. She had lived for thousands of years and taught countless people. A renowned sage.

She smiled at the two children and spoke of her life, her joys.

"My time has come. I have seen many centuries and reached the limits of seventh-class advancement..."

She held their hands.

"I do not know what tomorrow holds, but can you make an old woman a promise?"

They nodded.

Her smile softened as her face withered.

"Create something beautiful."

Those were the final words of Sithara Nova.

She did not remember where those words had come from. Only that someone important to her had once made her promise the same.

Years later, in a dark abyss beneath Lysithara, Valarie would smile at her stubborn apprentice Damon and asked him to create something beautiful.

In the end, that was the answer.

"We are all prisoners of time," the Unknown God muttered.

"Dancing in the hands of our choice of our fate."

Chapter 890: Black Death

"Things never seem to go my way, and I have learned to adjust to these small but fatal changes."

A beautiful man sat in a chair holding a book. His dark skin was more beautiful than even the most striking dark elves, his hair long and slick silver. His gaze remained fixed on the book in his hands.

Reaching into it, he pulled out a half-withered flower.

A small smile touched his lips.

"It was worth the risk."

Keeping Damon alive was important, but it was only a side quest. Something he had to handle while his real objective was the flower he had given Lilith. She had tested its parameters perfectly and even returned the sample with sufficient data.

The Unknown God was satisfied with this outcome.

"The experiment to see if highly complex magic can bypass the divine system undetected was a success. I was prepared for Minerva to notice me."

He flipped the pages of the book he was reading.

"This was a most fruitful experiment. Now all that's left is to perfect it."

The Unknown God's name had been forgotten by everyone after Minerva, the goddess of doom, erased it. But that did not mean he had no name. He knew his name, and he could tell it to those he wanted.

Without knowing who it belonged to specifically, it would not trigger anything.

It was similar to how Jack was a common name. Just because you erased the name of one specific Jack did not mean someone else could not be named Jack.

This was the loophole that allowed her to do that to him. While he hated his name, it was still something he was attached to.

"I can invade Doom's domain because of her attribute, bride of the demon god, but I cannot do the same to unrelated gods. But with this..."

He lifted the flower as its petals began to morph, its form changing slowly until it became a seed.

There was a small flower pot on the table. He waved his hand and planted the seed.

"I intentionally went out of my way to be flashy, yet you still did not show yourself, Minerva..."

"I even went out of my way to come live in your divine domain just for the opportunity to spring a trap."

He glanced outside the house, where streets were lined with symbols of the goddess of doom.

Her divine energy filled every corner of this realm.

"Why haven't you acted, and what traps have you put in place for me? No matter. It's time to push forward to the final phase."

"Hmmm, who are you talking to?"

A woman's voice came from behind him. He frowned slightly, then wore a gentle smile.

A beautiful woman stood by the doorway wearing a pristine white dress. To call her beautiful would be an insult, and to say she was the fairest would make the word itself die of shame for being unworthy.

"Altair, are you talking to yourself again?"

She shook her head with a small smile.

"My scholar husband is quite the eccentric."

He chuckled. He had restrained everything that made him the Unknown God just to hide from Minerva. Everything was part of his cover.

"Welcome back, Mina."

This woman was also part of his cover. He had met her here when he first arrived, and by some twist of fate, they had been wed.

In a sense, she was the bride of the demon god.

This was just an ordinary couple in Doom's domain. The wife held some noble status, and the husband was a wandering scholar who had settled there.

If not for the fact that they were both otherworldly beautiful, they would not even stand out.

.....

The nightmare was over, and no one truly figured out what the Unknown God wanted.

But it did not matter.

He was the ultimate victor.

When the light faded, Damon found himself staring at a familiar location.

He was standing in the very center of the area where the war games had taken place.

Everyone was back. Those who survived, those who lived, those who endured the nightmare and all its trials.

Not everyone made it back. Many had fallen.

But those who did...

The first person to be consumed by the nightmare was the first to feel it.

The call.

The call of fourth-class advancement.

He was not even in the third class. He had been in the second, yet somehow he had survived against all odds, and now he was hearing it.

The call of a rank he never thought he would reach in his lifetime.

Fourth-class advancement.

The Unknown God had kept his promise.

All around him, people were breaking through and reaching new ranks.

Damon was no different.

He collapsed to his knees, armor clinging to his bleeding frame.

"Ahh..."

He heard the familiar voice of the world.

[Death, death without cure spreads in the name of life, by your black hand the plague on all]

The ancient voice whispered in his ears.

[You have awakened the unique class: Black Death]

[Class skill: none]

[You have been rewarded with a skill scroll]

Skill scroll is in use.

[You have been bestowed the class skill]

[Class skill: Plague of Steel]

"The plague spreads through the blade."

[Your fable continues]

What followed was a cascade of system chimes highlighting the changes to his stats and skills.

Damon felt his body changing, his soul growing stronger and stronger until it felt as though it had taken a small physical form within him. This nascent soul connected itself to the ambient energy of the world.

Then the final system chime sounded.

[Class: Black Death]

"Plague of blood, fields of steel, death spreads in the name of life."

When Damon saw it, he understood.

It symbolized his nature now. Forced to survive, he would kill anything that threatened his life.

He spread death in the name of life.

His life.

And considering Deathless would soon throw everything it had at him, he was about to engage in one hell of a slaughter.

"Fine. Bring it on."

He had the power.

Damon raised his head and noticed the many eyes fixed on him. Only then did he realize he was still holding the elixir.

He stored it in his shadow storage. It might have disappeared before, but now that they were back, he had no such concern.

He was not worried.

No one could take it from him.

Though the old monsters of the higher classes were another matter.

'We must have been gone for many months.'

Crack.

The barrier in the sky shattered, and they found themselves back in the outside world.

When Damon looked up, everyone was in the stands just as they had been.

Even his sister, seated in the Brightwater family's pavilion.

It was as if no time had passed at all.

A white blur flashed as the elf king Kadelas rushed toward Sylvia, checking on his daughter with a worried expression.

There was noise everywhere. Shouts, disbelief, emotion.

But to Damon and the others who had survived the nightmare, it all felt unreal.