

## Shadow 891

### Chapter 891: Deathless Strikes Back

Cassian frowned. They had just witnessed everyone sent into the arena being consumed and wiped out by a horrible creature, its dark form covering everything, its aura pressing against the very limits of the world.

Before that, they had actually witnessed the presence of god.

They had only a few minutes to react to all of this before they were returned, spat out in the very place they had been consumed. The giant nightmare dissolved into motes of light.

His hands shook slightly as he scanned the crowd of participants, now no more than half the number the war games had started with.

He let out a small sigh of relief when he spotted his daughter and nephew still alive.

More importantly, he could feel it.

Their auras.

Every single one of them had reached it.

"The Fourth Class advancement," someone muttered, voicing what he was thinking.

Emperor Kronos stepped forward, his face carefully hiding the anguish of losing his son.

"Abellona."

He touched his daughter's head, though that was all the affection he could show in public. Even this was too much. The emperor was not supposed to lose his composure, but he was a father who had just witnessed one child die and the other disappear. Should he not be glad that the goddess returned one to him, even if he had lost the other?

She lowered her head slightly.

Evangeline rushed into her father's arms when she saw him. She was not the only one. Many young masters and noble ladies who had been acting tough and fighting wars, at least those closer to Damon's age, could not have been happier to see their families again.

To see the world where they were safe.

Damon missed that feeling. Being able to sense mana again, the sensation of his birth world welcoming him whole, without rejection, without treating him like an invasive disease that needed to be cleansed.

He raised his head and spotted a white haired girl running down a flight of stairs, followed by Brightwater knights trying desperately to protect her. Ahead of her, a pink haired girl was running toward him as well.

Damon lowered his head, biting his lip. When he raised it again, both of them crashed into his arms.

He held them without saying a word. They seemed to be speaking, but Damon was in a daze. He was not sure if it was the curse or his own emotions, but seeing his sister so happy that he was alive made him realize just how selfish dying would have been.

Not that he had a choice in living either. He was forced to do so by the curse.

'Well, at least Deathless has not thrown any life threatening trials my way yet.'

"Damon Grey, hand over the elixir of pseudo immortality. A lowly commoner should not be holding such a legendary treasure."

Someone spoke coldly as a powerful aura slammed into Damon. He waved his hand dismissively, then glanced at Luna and Iris.

"Go. Now."

He ordered it flatly. The Brightwater knights did not wait for the two girls to respond and immediately pulled them away.

Damon turned around to find a nobleman staring at him. His daughter was among the survivors.

Damon looked him up and down.

"Do I know you?"

The nobleman, who appeared to be at least a count, scoffed.

"You are quite arrogant, commoner. Your vanity will be the end of you."

Damon frowned slightly.

"No, I was not being vain this time. I genuinely do not know who you are. Aren't you like a background character or something? I mean, if you were important, I would know about you."

The man's face shifted several shades at the roundabout insult.

He was not the only one. Damon could hear different young nobles spreading information about the elixir. Not many of them even knew what it did, so the rumors grew more exaggerated by the second.

It went from being a cure all, to an immortality formula, to containing the secrets of godhood itself.

The alchemists wanted it. The mages wanted it. The nobles wanted it. Everyone wanted it. More importantly, the temple had also set its eyes on him.

Father Dantalion, the witch hunter, watched with keen interest. His gaze briefly passed over Paimon, the demon lord present, but showed no change in expression.

"Enough, boy. We alchemists demand you hand over the elixir so the institute can study it."

"What nonsense," a mage from the magic continent shouted.

"This should clearly be given to the Magic Academy. We on the magic continent have the best tools and can properly study such an elixir."

Damon sighed. This was getting annoying. None of them had even seen the elixir, yet they were already acting this way.

They argued as if he was not even there. Then again, it might as well have been true. He was not at their level yet.

Lilith bit her lip, ready to ask her grandmother for help. This was partly her fault. She might have revealed the elixir, and even if she had not, they would have found out eventually.

Damon shook his head.

He had celebrated too early. It seemed Deathless had already begun its attempts to kill him.

His danger sense screamed as he watched powerful people lay greedy claims to something that was rightfully his.

Seras Blade observed the scene with calm interest.

"Well, it looks like he really survived. Although at this rate, not for long. There is really only one option for him here."

Damon sneered, his face turning cold.

"Even if I gave it to you, none of you would dare take it."

He reached into his shadow storage and pulled out the elixir. Why? Because he was Damon Grey. Just because he was cursed to survive did not mean he had to be humble. If he had been cursed with humility instead, it would have been far more debilitating.

The golden liquid shimmered.

"This is the elixir."

Then he put it back into his shadow storage.

He drew a line on the ground with a slice of magic.

"I dare any of you to cross that line and see what I will do."

There was a pause. They stared at the young man who had only just reached the Fourth Class. What exactly was he planning to do?

An old man in the Sixth Class stepped forward.

The moment he crossed the line, Damon vanished.

When he reappeared, he was standing behind the grand duke, one hand gripping the man's robes.

"Save me grandpa," he screamed shamelessly.

The grand duke froze for a split second, then his expression hardened as instinct took over.

His voice dropped, cold as winter.

"Who dares to touch my grandson."

The entire arena fell silent.

His grandson?

Chapter 892: Second Time In History

Someone was just about to call him a retard for running behind the grand duke and screaming "grandpa," but the grand duke actually agreed.

And stood by him firmly.

Damon wore a smug smile. He was safe here. Who dared touch him now? No one.

An old noble with deeply wrinkled skin stepped forward, his expression calm and composed.

"Your Excellency, if I may," he said politely. "Do you not think it is a bit unreasonable to claim this boy as your grandson over a mere elixir?"

He bowed slightly, his aura subdued.

"Please consider your reputation."

Damon glanced up at the grand duke, then leaned close to his ear.

"Grandpa, is this guy calling you a liar? He deserves to die."

The grand duke's eyes turned cold.

A flash of light followed.

Before the old noble could even react, both of his arms were gone. Just like that. He had not even been given the chance to resist.

Damon smiled like a fox that had just realized the mountain tiger had mistaken it for one of its cubs.

Except in this case, he really was one of its cubs.

"Nepotism is only bad when I am not benefiting from it."

Cassian frowned when Damon said that.

'He said the quiet part out loud.'

Damon took a deep breath. His sister was staring at him in confusion. She was the one person present who had no idea what was actually going on.

Everyone reacted differently to what they had just witnessed, but at this point the grand duke was not even surprised that Damon had figured it out.

As expected of his grandson.

A soft sigh came from Aurelius Venn as he rose to his feet.

"I had no idea the Golden Death had a son," he said, directing his words specifically at Cassian.

Cassian sighed. He had simply been minding his own business, yet somehow they had found a way to drag him into trouble.

"While you may see an uncanny resemblance, I assure you I am not his father."

Damon placed a hand over his chest.

"You are breaking my heart."

Cassian sighed again. He really wanted this to be over so they could all just go home already.

"Then how exactly is he related to you, Grand Duke?" Aurelius pressed, seeking confirmation of what he already suspected.

"That is not important. This is a family matter, and outsiders should not involve themselves," the grand duke replied sharply. Someone else could explain things to the temple. It would not be him.

Damon let out a quiet sigh of relief.

He had been in real danger moments ago, so he had simply sprung the trap he had prepared for his grandfather. The truth was, Damon never planned on leaving this place without exposing their relationship.

As for the fallout, that was the old man's problem.

Still, Damon had to press his advantage.

He pointed at those present.

"How dare you treat me this way? Have you forgotten that I was the one who defeated Amon? Was I not promised rewards? I distinctly remember the temple offering me the illustrious title of hero."

He then glanced toward the emperor.

"And the empire promised me an enormous sum of money and a noble title."

The emperor's expression did not change. He had not forgotten. If anything, he had simply been observing the entire time.

"The empire has not forgotten its promise to you."

Damon looked around, searching for anyone else who owed him something. His gaze landed on Seras Blade.

"Do not think I forgot about you either."

She chuckled.

"You really are a cockroach. You certainly did not get that from your mother. I wonder if it came from your father's side."

The old man from the Ravenscroft family laughed softly.

"Ah, I see. So this is Ranar's son. You should have said something. What a small world. To think one of Xander's friends would be the son of Ranar Brightwater."

"Ranar Brightwater? Didn't she die years ago?"

"Yes, I even attended her funeral."

"Then why would the grand duke lie?"

Damon raised his hand.

"Sorry to interrupt, but he and I are not friends. More like classmates who put up with each other."

Clap. Clap. Clap.

The sound echoed through the arena.

Damon turned toward it.

Paimon.

She had been silent the entire time. After gathering the surviving demon heirs onto her dromedary, she stood atop the creature's head.

"Thank you. I never realized the goddess races had so much drama," she said lightly. "I was thoroughly entertained. Unfortunately, I do not have all day, and it is getting rather late. So if you do not mind, I have a small declaration to make."

She cleared her throat as dark wings unfurled behind her back.

"I know this is not customary, and there has only ever been one precedent in our history, but I am making a declaration. A declaration of war on all goddess races on behalf of the Demon Continent."

Her voice rang out.

"In the forgotten name of the Unknown God, I, Paimon, High Priestess of the Snake Temple, declare war on all of you."

Her dromedary rose into the sky. A spatial rift opened, and Paimon vanished.

Just like that, the world stood on the brink of war once more.

In all past incidents, the goddess races had always been the ones to declare war. When they did, the demon races inevitably suppressed them and drove the conflict back to the goddess lands.

There had only ever been one precedent where the demons declared war first.

That was during the Era of Ashcroft, when the Demon Lord of Domination acted as Demon King and ordered all demons, who were treated as a minority at the time, to rise up.

That was the era when demon supremacy began.

Suddenly, every other problem seemed insignificant.

The goddess races, once divided by countless differences, now stood closer than ever.

It was a strange truth.

Hatred united people faster than love ever could.

"We must prepare for war. This is no time to hesitate," some nobles shouted.

"There is going to be another war? The last one was only a few years ago."

"Have the demons gone mad?"

"We have not even fully recovered from the last one."

"Is this the end? Has Ashcroft returned?"

In an instant, Damon's dramatic reveal no longer mattered.

The demon race had declared war.

Damon remained silent, staring in the direction Paimon had disappeared. His danger sense pulsed with distant intensity.

He was certain of it now.

Deathless was going to throw him somewhere truly dangerous.

'Damn it. I do not want to die.'

The curse embedded in his heart responded instinctively, forcing Damon's reflexes to act in the sole interest of preserving his life.

Chapter 893: All Good Things

The emperor acted quickly to organize everyone as the host. Since many major figures were already present, it was best to coordinate a response and perhaps set up an initial plan before everyone rushed back to protect their respective domains.

There was also the possibility of immediate demon attacks, as they had officially entered a time of war.

The heads of the war banks would begin shifting everything into a wartime economy. Funds would be redirected toward military preparations and all of the many requirements that war demanded.

Damon dragged Luna and Iris along with him and followed Evangeline and her mother back to the Brightwater family's castle in the capital. It was the safest place they could be.

Inside the carriage, everyone was silent. Today had been a day filled with revelations. Damon kept sneaking glances at his sister, hoping she would say something.

"I am not going to ask if you do not want to tell me," she muttered.

Damon smiled.

"Actually, I was hoping you would."

"How long have you known?" she interrupted, eager for answers.

Damon shrugged, his body still aching from the wounds he had suffered in the nightmare.

"A while now. Did you know Mom actually wanted us to live with the old geezer all these years? Funny thing is, the villagers knew but did not dare tell us. They did not even bother learning the details. The moment they heard 'noble,' they froze in fear."

Luna glared at him coolly.

"You really kept this from me all this time, huh?"

Damon reached out and touched her head.

"If it makes you feel any better, Evangeline knew too and was playing dumb."

Evangeline clicked her tongue.

"I only found out recently too. Stop trying to throw me under the carriage."

Damon still found a way to terrorize Evangeline until they finally reached the castle.

...

The sun had long since set, and the day's chaos was finally over.

After so long, Damon took out the elixir in his room. He placed it on the table and glanced at Luna.

"This is it. The elixir of pseudo immortality. Honestly, I do not know the full extent of what it can do. All I know is that it can cure you."

Luna picked up the vial and looked at her brother.

"I do not need to hear the risks. I trust you. Besides, from now on, it will be my turn to protect you."

She raised the vial and drank its contents.

For a moment, nothing seemed to change.

Then her hair glowed brightly with white light. Her heart overflowed with magical energy, and her body lifted slightly into the air before gently settling back down.

She raised her hand, checking her body. Her lips quivered as she guided mana through her magic circuits.

"The pain... it is gone," she whispered, tears slipping from her eyes.

Damon smiled softly. If he had died, he would never have witnessed this sight.

Luna could not stop crying, and Damon let her. The poor girl had been through far too much.

Eventually, she fell asleep, and Damon carried her to her room.

When he returned to his own room, he found a red haired young woman sitting on his bed.

He smiled faintly when he saw her.

"I did not expect the demons to declare war on us. Everything is happening so quickly," she muttered.

Damon shrugged.

It had been inevitable.

He sat down beside her.

"You were right. Maybe dying was not the answer. I thought I could defy him by dying, but the Unknown God proved that I could not. He is the god of choice, so how could I believe any choice I made would escape him?"

He lowered his head.

"Even if I died, what would stop him from bringing me back? He already showed he has that power. I could trap myself in an endless loop of killing myself, and he would simply revive me again and again."

Lilith narrowed her eyes slightly.

"If that is the case, then what was his objective? Something worth investing so much into. Were you the target, or were you merely bait?"

She held her head.

"There was the flower. It must have been important if he made Ittorath retrieve it. That flower had to be his primary objective. But what if he was also trying to show us Lazarak's past?"

Turning to face him, she sat on the bed with her legs folded beneath her.

"What if he was setting a trap for the goddess races? We may not like what we went through, but we gained far more knowledge than before. We likely know more about the Zero Epoch and the events that led to the fall of the gods than most."

She lifted a key in her hand.

"And the Tomb of Lazarak. No, the tomb of the lesser gods. This must be where all the lesser gods slumber."

Damon sighed.

"I suppose the only thing left to figure out now is Mugu's past and his origins in the demon continent, Centros."

Lilith lowered her head slightly, then nodded.

"Yes. But that is not the only reason I came. I wanted to apologize. For everything. I am sorry I could not respect your decision."

Damon shook his head.

"You were right, and I was less right."

He placed his hand over hers.

She stood up slowly.

"I should go. Let us talk in the morning."

Damon grabbed her hand. His heart pounded as he pulled her back into his arms.

He kissed her neck slowly, making her face flush red.

He whispered into her ear.

Then he kissed her lips. They were soft, and he breathed in the scent of gardenia.

He reached for the zipper on her back and slowly pulled it down, his hand brushing against her bare skin as her dress slipped away.

He pressed his hand against the soft whiteness of her chest, and she let out a quiet moan.

He pushed her gently onto the bed as she undid his clothes in return.

Their soft moans echoed through the room as they rolled together in the sheets.

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End of Volume Six

Author's Note

At last, that wretch has cracked. Imagine my anguish seeing him have his way with Lilith—that scum. I am sure you all never notice due to how well I treat him, but I live to ruin his life.

But that is fine. As a guy, I feel pain when I see myself dying of thirst while another guy is drowning. Enjoy yourself, Damon. I will be cooking you next arc.

My green rants aside.

Volume Six was all about digging up the past and maybe finding the origin of the promise: "Create something beautiful."

Which, as you have seen, has no clear, traceable origin. Time works in mysterious ways, far be it for mortals to comprehend.

That said, it is time to end this volume. It has been here longer than I intended, but I do not like to half-ass things. Nevertheless, the ending is at hand—just three more arcs to go.

I hope you stick with me to the end.

Signed,

Rengadex

Chapter 894: L.A.Z.A.R.A.K

Logistics, Arcana, Zenith Applications & Research of Aetherus Kinetics

This was the name on the building.

It was a large guild. It had only been started three months earlier, but it was heavily funded and supported by very powerful families.

One of the most prominent were the Brightwater household and the Astranova household.

Rumors even said the two houses were in a serious competition to see who could do more.

And that was how this building came to be. It was prime real estate, an estate that stretched for miles, with its heart in the capital city, Valerion.

Naturally, the founders of this organization were none other than the illustrious Count Damon Grey.

Yes, you had to use the full title.

And of course, the young lady of House Astranova.

On the surface, it was a place for alchemical research and the production of potions, medicine, as well as a large-scale military–industrial complex.

Then the question was, how did this new organization suddenly spring up so easily?

The answer to that was simple: unique innovation not seen by the modern world.

And they came at the nick of time, because the world, not just the Valtheron Empire, had entered a wartime economy.

So this organization—

Logistics, Arcana, Zenith Applications & Research of Aetherus Kinetics

—was going to be making a killing in profits. And with their influence, it would only be a matter of time before they overwhelmed the giants of the industry.

In a posh office within the building, a young man sat with a sour expression, beads of sweat dropping from his head. He kept looking left and right with an anxious expression.

A woman sat on a beautiful sofa, sipping tea not far from his finely finished table.

"Can you not do that..." she glanced at him with a deadpan expression.

She had long red hair that seemed to glimmer, her emerald green eyes reflecting in the red tea she was drinking.

Damon took a deep breath, gritting his teeth.

"Easy for you to say... you didn't wake up to a dragon in your bedroom. How—how did it even— I turned off Deathless with Dethrone. I knew the one month where nothing happened was going to ruin me..."

Lilith held her temple with a sigh.

"That wasn't a dragon, it was a drake. And... it was only in the Third Class advancement. You killed it easily."

Damon slammed his hand on the table.

"Then explain how a damn drake ended up in my room. I live in a secure location. I even had my grandfather send Jarvis to protect me. How—how does a ten-meter drake get into my room?"

Lilith paused.

Hmm. That made a lot of sense. How was that possible?

A wild monster couldn't just sneak into Valerion, and even if it did, it would never reach that far into the city without being seen and killed. And assuming it was someone's familiar or a tamed beast for war, it still wouldn't be able to enter Damon's room.

She shrugged, shaking her head.

"I don't know. Maybe it teleported in. I mean, it was a space-attribute monster."

Damon crossed his arms, looking at her with a pale face.

"I—I knew it. Deathless got you too. You're all colluding against me..."

She shook her head, glaring at him.

"Can you stop being paranoid for a moment? Geez. Your skill isn't that dangerous. I mean, not much happened in the past three months. Besides, haven't you been using Dethrone to offset it?"

Damon nodded, feeling slightly better.

"Right, right... I'm paranoid. But what if— I mean, what if Dethrone isn't actually doing anything? I know Deathless. If it could just be stopped by some skill, I would have died ages ago."

She put down her teacup.

"Don't worry. You're still alive, aren't you? And besides, if you do die, you'd get your wish..."

"Ptuiii."

Damon spat on the ground, not minding the clearly expensive carpentry.

"How dare you curse me to die."

Lilith rolled her eyes.

"At least we know the curse is still in effect."

She stood up and walked over to him, kissing him lightly on the cheek.

Then she whispered,

"For every ordeal you survive... I'll take a bath with you."

Damon paused for a moment, his expression suddenly more serious.

"Deathless has been holding out on me. When is it going to try to kill me? I'm tired of waiting..."

He then grabbed Lilith's hand.

"What kind of bath are we talking about? It better not be one of those lame-ass bubble baths that covers everything in bubbles."

She rolled her eyes.

"You decide."

He smiled evilly.

"You're the best."

She chuckled slightly, shaking her head.

"Anyway, you wanting to take advantage of little old me aside, we've made significant progress."

Damon picked up a paper from his desk and pulled Lilith onto his lap.

"Yes, we have. We've made ourselves crucial in the military-industrial complex. You were right to keep ourselves from being a competitor, by choosing not to sell weapons directly, we avoid making enemies."

He glanced at the paper before putting it down.

"Instead, we sell crucial spare parts designed by us, which become the lifeline in weapon production, rune circuits and magic seals from Lysithara, as well as a monopoly on rare smelting methods."

He leaned his head on her shoulder.

"And now we have a secure market thanks to the war. Though we have some enemies in the potion-making department, it can't be helped."

Damon pushed her hair slightly, the fresh scent of gardenia touching his nose.

"It can't be helped. You win some, you lose some. That little leprechaun has been working overtime for us. Though it's still disappointing, the potions made with Lysithara formulas, while great, are nothing compared to the ones the System gives me..."

Lilith nodded, her body pressed against his.

"Well, it can't be helped. We can't compare to the level of alchemy the Unknown God is capable of..."

She placed her hand on his shoulder.

"Anyway—to the future growth of Logistics, Arcana, Zenith Applications & Research of Aetherus Kinetics... or Lazarak for short."

That was the name of the organization.

Lazarak.

The name was chosen to honor the God of Darkness, Lazarak. And the greater the organization grew, the more people would know the name.

Now his friend would never be forgotten.

Logistics, Arcana, Zenith Applications & Research of Aetherus Kinetics

L.A.Z.A.R.A.K

Chapter 895: Calm Days Wither

The door opened, and a violet-haired young woman entered. When she saw the two of them, she frowned.

"You guys sent me out there just so you could touch yourselves..."

Lilith's face reddened slightly as she stood up from Damon's lap.

"We w-we... were just talking..."

"Yeah, sure you were..."

"Ahem." Damon cleared his throat.

"So, Renata. Anything to report?"

She sighed, rubbing her temple. Whether it was a headache or mild jealousy was unclear.

"Well, I managed to send out the invitations as you requested, and we are currently recruiting members for the secondary organization. We also need to hide our financial trails, but I have that covered for now. Production of shadow drones has increased, but it is still slower than when you were in the nightmare."

Renata continued her report while Damon listened quietly. He eventually sighed.

Apart from the main organization, Lazarak, Damon had been using Amon, his shadow clone, to create another organization in the shadows. However, organizations required resources, and resources left trails. That was why Renata was indispensable. She had the expertise to manage everything behind the scenes and was effectively running Lazarak itself.

The main organization acted as the sponsor of their terrorist organization, or as Lilith preferred to call it, their freedom fighting organization.

Their primary goal was to destroy the Temple. It was a long-term project, but it allowed them to act without direct scrutiny.

At the same time, they were also donors to the Temple. No one would suspect Lazarak of opposing the goddess if they appeared to support her.

Lilith handled the political landscape, dealing with nobles and leverage.

Renata handled administration and control.

As for Damon, he handled the military might of the organization.

"Hm. That is troublesome," he muttered.

Renata crossed her arms and sat on his desk.

"The demon wars have begun, but so far there have been no attacks. The higher-ups are still discussing plans moving forward. For now, the world is simply preparing for war."

Damon nodded. His grandfather had mentioned that the goddess races were considering launching an offensive before the demon lords could act.

"Yes. What about the Ashcroft fragments? Any news?"

Renata pulled out a document from her folder.

"The Temple is being cautious. They are gathering whatever fragments they can find in Soltheon and sealing them away. Most of them are likely in the Holy Empire."

She then took out another paper.

"The demon continent supposedly stole many of the fragments during the last demon war, when the great dragon Ashergon destroyed a city in the Holy Empire. After reaching the demon continent, several sealed fragments broke free and scattered. Only a few made it to the Snake Temple."

Damon crossed his arms. Ashcroft had been slain by the goddess in Soltheon, so it made sense that many fragments originated there. The Temple had spent centuries tracking, sealing, and destroying them with the Empire's help. Most were sealed in the Holy Empire, but many had been stolen.

"Which means the most powerful fragments are on the demon continent. The ones the Temple has now are likely fewer and weaker."

Renata nodded.

"This information was not easy to obtain. The Temple does not want anyone knowing the demons possess the fragments, so it has been kept quiet since the last war. So, how do you intend to reward me for this information?"

She leaned in, her face inches from his.

Damon did not want to look at her. Having a beautiful, seductive woman this close was terrible for his mental health, and Lilith's murderous glare was not helping.

"Thank you very much, Renata," he said flatly.

Renata smiled, brushing her nose lightly against his before whispering, "Now that is boring."

Damon dissolved into shadow and reappeared on the sofa.

"Anyway, this means I need to go to the demon continent and obtain Ashcroft fragments. That should help complete my domination attributes and possibly allow me to rank up. But right now, I am more focused on learning how to build a domain."

Renata pushed off the desk and sat across from him.

"With this war, the demon continent will be even more dangerous than usual."

Damon shook his head.

"I am not so sure. For all we know, everything we think we know about the demon realm could just be propaganda. They make it sound like the entire continent is a death zone."

Renata nodded.

"Alright. I will make preparations so your clone can go. You are also set to travel to the Holy Empire to receive your reward for defeating Amon. In other words, yourself, in the war games."

Damon smiled smugly.

"So those bastards finally decided to give me the title of hero after all that nonsense."

Lilith smiled, tucking her hair behind her ear.

"How does it feel to have your childhood dream fulfilled? You are finally a hero, officially."

Damon rubbed his chin.

"Hm. What does it feel like? Let me think. It feels like I scammed the whole world. Still, Damon Grey, the legendary hero, has a nice ring to it."

Renata laughed.

"To think they are making a demon a hero. And not just any demon, but the inheritor of the Demon Lord of Domination. The world really has gone mad."

Damon could not deny it. The world truly had gone mad. At this point, he was only partially demonized. The process had slowed thanks to the divine spark he had obtained from Lazarak.

What it actually did, however, remained a mystery.

Appraisal did not work on it, and no library he knew of mentioned anything similar.

He frowned and looked at Renata.

"And Ittorath. Any news?"

Renata's expression turned serious. She shook her head.

"No. Tracking a transcendent entity is far more difficult than expected. For now, it seems he is lying low."

Lilith bit her lip.

"If I am not mistaken, he plans to release his main body in Lysithara."

Damon nodded.

"Easier said than done. The people of Lysithara who were corrupted will never allow that. They still hate those nightmares to this day."

Renata scoffed.

"So you are saying he will try another way."

"Yes," Damon said quietly. "Of that, I am certain."

Chapter 896: Road Trip

He was really exhausted. Despite the fact that the Valtheron Empire shared a border with the Holy Empire, it was still a pain to go there. But if Damon wanted his rewards from the Temple, he had to go, so he sucked it up and headed for the Holy Empire.

His rewards included a title of Count and land, as well as many other resources given to him by the Empire. Damon was significantly wealthy and powerful at the moment, more than any low- to mid-tier noble families, not to mention his powerful background.

Now the Temple was giving him a holy relic and the title of Hero, which was even better.

It was not easy to be called a Hero, and those who earned it, like Seras Blade, had killed many, many, many of the goddess race's enemies. Not to mention she was a living legend.

Damon had grown up hearing tales of Seras Blade. You could imagine how much influence she wielded as a Hero.

Now Damon was also getting such a title, and of course a holy relic.

Which, honestly, could range from being absolutely powerful to just being some useless crap.

An example would be if they gave him the skull of some long-dead holy man and said it had the power to perform miracles, when really it was just the skull of some dead guy.

Or he could get a legendary weapon or tool.

He smiled softly.

He was looking forward to that part. That said, there were downsides, like having to tolerate those old clerics. He might even have to act like they were anything but corrupt.

"They better not ask me to kiss the ring or anything like that," he muttered coldly.

Renata raised an eyebrow slightly but said nothing.

There were three people in this carriage. That was Renata, Iris, and of course Damon himself.

This was a big day for Damon, so naturally his grandfather had gone out of his way to make things more complicated than they needed to be.

The old man had truly gone above and beyond for his grandson, and that was why the whole family was traveling to the Holy City.

There was a long trail of carriages that made up this entourage. Naturally, Evangeline and Luna were in the same carriage with the Grand Duke. The old man had wanted to put all his grandkids in the same carriage, but Damon slipped away, so he was left with just Evangeline and Luna.

Duke Cassian and his wife were in one carriage. Lucky them. It must have been peaceful there.

Iris was with Damon because she was more comfortable with him. He was her teacher, but more than that, he was not the imposing Grand Duke or the terrifying Duke.

So she was better off. Besides, she was not Damon and could not treat two of the most powerful people in the Empire so casually.

If acting like big shots did not matter was a skill, then Damon was holding out on her. Why was he not teaching it to her?

She paused for a moment. No. No, that was a bad idea. Damon was just crazy.

Iris snuck a glance at Damon. She wanted to tell him what leads she had found on her father's death, but decided to hold off. She was not really sure.

He seemed to be lost in thought, his gaze distant.

Renata was quiet, so Iris did not really have anyone to talk to.

"I really should have joined Luna's carriage."

Damon rolled his eyes when she said that.

"Good to know I'm unlikeable. That's how you treat your teacher, you unfilial apprentice."

Iris scoffed, crossing her arms.

"You're not that much older than me. Why are you acting like an old man?"

Damon reached out a finger and poked her cheeks.

"Which one of us is in the Fourth Class advancement?"

Iris sneered.

Right. He was in the Fourth Class. A powerhouse at such a young age. She so easily forgot that Damon Grey was a prodigy.

"Big deal. Even cats and dogs are Fourth Class now after the events of the nightmare."

Damon held his head. Right, that was true. His pets, the damn red squirrel and that wretched eye-loving raven, had also reached the Fourth Class.

It was like leaping into the heavens.

"What was that saying from the Demon Continent again? When a man ascends, even his dog reaches the heavens."

Renata sighed. This had been a long journey. At least it was going to end soon.

"That's not how the saying goes, and I don't think it even truly originated from the Demon Continent."

Damon shook his head, stopping her.

"I don't care. Just as long as I got my point across."

Iris pouted her lips.

"Why am I even here anyway? This whole journey is for family members, and well, I—"

"You're family," Damon cut her off. Then he smiled.

"You know the saying. Master for a day, father for life. So that means I'm your daddy. Quick, call me daddy."

Iris gave him a disgusted look when she recalled he had made Wendy kneel and call him daddy.

"Pervert. You're a pervert. A pervert."

Damon winced.

"I heard you the first time. Didn't have to say it thrice."

Seeing her expression, Damon smiled slightly. At least she was not cold and gloomy. This spitfire was just the way Iris was supposed to be.

He placed a hand on her head.

"That's my girl."

She took out a pager he had bought her.

"I'm calling Knight HQ to report a crime."

Damon gritted his teeth.

"What the hell? I was being nice."

"That's how nobles start. They act nice, then they take advantage of young girls. It was fine when you were a commoner. You weren't above the law. But now, who knows? You might start getting ideas," she ranted, a thin smile on her face.

Damon shifted slightly, moving a few inches away from her.

"What has Lilith been teaching you? And I'll have you know I like my women older than me, with a nice ass and killer tits. Your developing ass isn't my type."

She pointed at him, fingers shaking.

"I knew it. You've been staring at me, gauging your prey, huh?"

Damon paused.

"Alright, I admit it. You won this one. Let's call a truce."

He offered a handshake, which she took.

"And you better not forget it," she spoke smugly, having won against Damon.

He squeezed slightly in a display of absolute pettiness.

Her face twisted in pain, but she was too proud to admit it.

"What is it, Iris? Anything to say? Maybe a plea?"

Renata sighed, shaking her head.

"We're here. Welcome to the Holy Empire capital city."

#### Chapter 897: The Pool

The halls were quite big. Here, Damon felt something he really did not know was possible. He felt his shadow show fear for the first time.

The moment he set foot in the Holy City, his shadow became anxious. It stopped moving on its own and acted like a completely natural shadow.

However, the real turning point was when they entered the central temple.

It seemed uneasy.

The Holy City was the capital of the Holy Empire. It was here that the Temple held all of its true power. In a sense, it was a theocracy, funded and supported by the armies and resources of most of the powerful nations of the world.

All around the world, whenever a new ruler was crowned, they would come here to the Holy City on a pilgrimage, where they would kiss the feet of the goddess statue to show their loyalty.

It was a ceremonial procedure, but in truth it was also political. It was primarily so.

The architecture of the city was old and had one too many statues of the goddess. The streets were lined with many Holy Knights, and when Damon had entered, the people had cheered.

The Temple had truly gone out of its way to make a showing of his arrival, and naturally many powerful nobles had been present in the city. Some were invited by his grandfather, some by the Temple.

Despite the demon wars around the corner, seeing a new Hero was not to be taken lightly, especially with war looming so close.

Damon paused outside the grand temple. He could feel the deep fear and dread his shadow felt. It was overwhelming.

The dread even reached his own heart, and for good reason.

It was the structure at the center of the city, and this building was surrounded by people wearing long veils over their faces, wide gowns carrying the many ornaments that symbolized the goddess.

They sang her praises, moving slowly through the temple.

Damon knew this terrifying aura. He knew it too well. This was the aura he had felt the instant he had died.

This was the aura of the Goddess of Doom. Even if it was faint and almost nonexistent, Damon realized just how much dread he felt.

In his mind, he almost felt as if she was looking right at him.

The man in front of him turned to Damon.

"Awe-inspiring, isn't it?" he smiled, his hands hidden in his long white sleeves.

"This is the place. It was in this temple many years ago that the goddess destroyed Ashcroft, the Demon Lord of Domination."

He closed his eyes, taking a whiff of the clean air.

"If you focus, you can still sense it. Faint traces of divine energy. This is power even Ashcroft could not survive."

Damon kept his expression still, his gaze falling on his shadow.

That explained why his shadow was so meek. This was the place where Ashcroft had fallen.

His shadow was originally Ashcroft. It was only after he had died that the Unknown God had given him the shadow and his system.

'I'm not going to die the moment I enter the temple, right?'

At this point, that was a very real possibility. But Damon gritted his teeth and still took a step forward.

The inside was cool, yet there was an oppressive feeling in his chest, as if speaking too loudly here was a sin.

Even so, Damon could not turn back. He was in this temple to receive the title of Hero, which meant he would have to do some rituals and all that.

He had originally not taken them seriously, but now that he had come here, he had no choice but to do so.

After the ritual here, he would be presented to the crowd of people, guests, family, and nobles waiting outside.

The old man stopped in front of a large statue of the goddess. In front of this huge statue, easily thirty meters in height, there was a wide pool.

Around it were young women with veils covering their faces.

"This pool was formed after Ashcroft died. It is saturated with remnants of the goddess's divine energy. By bathing in it, your body will be reborn."

Damon felt a subtle, gentler wave of divine power coming from it.

The man moved his hand from his sleeve.

"But it is also very dangerous. Those who are unfit will die if they stay inside for too long. Seras Blade stayed inside the longest. She endured it for half an hour."

Damon narrowed his eyes. Half an hour. That was her limit. How dangerous was this pool if even Seras could not stay longer?

"However, the risk is worth it. Your body is refined to the peak and left with no impurities, and you gain a hint of the goddess's divine energy by bathing in it. Seras unlocked the full potential of her War Attribute."

He turned to the old man, who was in fact the High Templar.

"Your Holiness, if I may, what happens when I fail to endure?"

The old man closed his eyes slowly.

"Then you will be with the goddess shortly."

Damon winced. That did not sound like a good outcome.

The question was whether he should risk it. He was already affiliated with the Unknown God. Going in might very well kill him. But at the same time, he did not feel anything from his danger sense.

Still, he could not rely on his danger sense when dealing with the goddess or anything related to her.

Damon bit his lip as the women in white veils came and began to undress him, singing hymns.

To Damon, the hymn sounded like a death knell for his final moments.

He gritted his teeth and slowly stepped into the pool. As soon as he entered, Damon felt a strange and transcendent energy begin to scrutinize him, probing through his body.

He felt like if he was not careful, he would be crushed, or maybe lose an arm, a leg, or both.

However, when this energy reached his heart, it stopped.

Damon nearly stopped breathing as it zeroed in on the two contrasting forces in his heart.

The Seed of Depravity and the Divine Spark.

Then the pool began to churn as it boiled over.

The High Templar's eyes widened.

"Wha... what is happening?"

Chapter 898: Holy Child

It was as if the pool was gauging whether he was an enemy or an ally.

When it reached the Seed of Depravity, Damon felt a monstrous killing intent rise toward him. It was vast, ancient, and absolute. Before it could intensify further, however, the pool seemed to notice the Divine Spark.

Then everything went still.

A silence followed, one that felt as though it stretched on endlessly, even though Damon knew it had only been a brief moment.

This Divine Spark had come from Lazarak. Oddly enough, it was one of the only things that had returned with Damon from that nightmare.

The Divine Spark that had once belonged to Lazarak, the God of Darkness.

What it truly did, Damon did not know. All he knew was that whenever he tried to probe it, the Seed of Depravity would viciously pull at it. When that happened, Damon would be subjected to intense pain as the seed shaved away the spark's mysterious power.

Now, however, the pool's divine energy began to feed the spark.

What had once been a tiny, nearly invisible flicker began to swell and grow. Damon could feel it expanding.

At the same time, he gasped.

An overwhelming burst of pain tore through his body, ripping at his flesh, his soul, and even his heart. His magic circuits swelled, becoming stronger and more refined. His flesh hardened and strengthened, his aura expanded, and his pale skin took on a faint rosy hue, as if he were being refined into something closer to perfection.

Closer to what a perfect being should be.

Damon did not know how much time had passed. All he knew was that the pain was immense and that it was growing worse.

The Divine Spark had grown, and now it began to encroach upon the regions of his heart ruled by the Seed of Depravity.

The moment the two forces collided, blood sprayed from Damon's mouth as the agony forced a cry from his throat.

Even so, that was only the beginning.

The two forces contradicted one another completely. They could not coexist within the same place of being. One had to be eradicated, or Damon would die.

There was no middle ground.

One represented the path of a demon.

The other represented divinity.

These were transcendent forces that refused coexistence.

Light and dark.

Amid the pain, Damon felt a strange clarity. Perhaps it was his mind's attempt to detach from the suffering. In that fragile lucidity, a question surfaced.

How could the Unknown God possess both?

Was he also enduring this pain? Or had he discovered a way to fuse two sources of extreme power together?

He truly was Unknown.

A singular existence.

The Demon God.

Damon knew he had to act quickly, or die.

At this point, the pool was healing him as fast as it could, but his body continued to crack and shatter. Blood soaked into the pool, only to be forcibly returned to his body. He was trapped in a cycle of birth and destruction happening simultaneously.

The moment it stopped, he would explode and die.

Lazarak had given him this Divine Spark, but why, Damon did not know.

As for why the pool had recognized him, Damon had a theory.

Perhaps it was because Lazarak had been created by the goddess herself. Even if he had rebelled, he was still a god who originated from her.

The High Templar's eyes widened in shock. Never in all his years had he witnessed anything like this. He did not understand what he was seeing, but as the divine energy within the pool surged and the faint glow in Damon's chest intensified, he fell to his knees in fanatical devotion.

"He... he... he is chosen..." he whispered.

He was not.

Not even close.

The goddess would never choose Damon. In truth, he was in an unfortunate situation, and had the damn old man pulled him out earlier, Damon might have survived this ordeal more easily. Unfortunately, what should have been a simple ritual had turned into a struggle between life and death.

Damon could feel the Seed of Depravity losing ground under the immense power of the pool. Even if it was only a sliver of the goddess's divine energy, that sliver could fold the universe like a sheet of paper. It was not infinite, but it was terrifyingly close.

The Divine Spark continued pushing forward.

But Damon had not nurtured the spark himself.

Unlike the Seed of Depravity, which had been born from resentment, slaughter, and countless souls that had died by his hand or because of him.

He had already begun his transformation into a demon. The seed had progressed far, dangerously far, and was on the verge of full emergence.

And now, this spark was undoing all of it.

In the most tyrannical way imaginable.

All Damon could think was,

"Damn it... I'm going to die."

Three hours passed. Or at least he thought so.

His body was broken and rebuilt in a vicious cycle. Bones were crushed and reforged. Organs ruptured and restored. Even so, the Seed of Depravity stubbornly endured.

How could defiance be erased so easily?

How could a demon bend before divinity?

Demons were born from resistance. Defiance was their nature. Even the true Demon Kings had defied, and that was why they became demons.

As the churning water dragged him toward the edge of the pool, Damon made his decision. The moment he reached the rim, he gathered all his remaining strength for one final push.

He was going to get out.

Then the High Templar's eyes flashed.

"Do not let the current ruin the ritual. Push the chosen one back in."

Damon nearly cursed.

He would have, if he could.

Instead, he was shoved back into the pool. Pain erupted again, and the spark surged.

'Damn it... I need to do something. Anything.'

For the past three hours, he had tried suppressing the spark. It had borne little fruit.

There was one final option.

One he had been avoiding.

But to attempt it, he needed a moment of absolute clarity.

Damon drew a deep, shaky breath. This was dangerous. To do this, he would have to stop suppressing the Divine Spark entirely and focus on something else.

For even a single second, his heart could rupture completely.

And then he would truly die.

Was he prepared to take that gamble?

"No risk, no reward."

He let go.

His heart ruptured. He felt death close in.

And in that same instant, he channeled his shadow energy and forced it between the Seed of Depravity and the Divine Spark.

A chill spread.

Then, just like that, the two forces stopped clashing.

They were separated by a wall of shadows.

Damon finally relaxed.

He let his body go limp and floated within the pool as it slowly healed him. When the pain finally faded, he stood and walked out.

That was the longest moment of his life.

When he lifted his head, he found himself surrounded by the highest members of the clergy. Each wore the Temple's highest-ranked garments, their faces obscured, their presence overwhelming.

There were nine of them.

He had heard of them.

The Nine Elders of Conflict.

"When did they get here...?" Damon muttered.

"Twenty-seven hours..." the High Templar whispered.

"You lasted twenty-seven hours..."

Damon narrowed his eyes. That could not be right. At most, he thought only a few hours had passed.

Then he frowned.

Had he been drifting in and out of consciousness?

His body felt light, far too light. Something had changed. His mana had been completely refined. That alone had been a major bottleneck for him. Even with additional mana cores, he had expected the process to take years, unless he unlocked the secret of a domain.

Yet now, he stood at the absolute limits of his rank.

Without even forming a domain.

"So... did I get the Hero title or what?"

"Hero..." one of the Elders murmured.

"No. You are a Holy Child. A Holy Child blessed by the goddess. You will be the light that ends the evils of this era."

Damon did not know what to say as the man continued.

"You will stand at the forefront of our war against the demons. The vanguard of our actions. The one who brings war. All hail the Child of War."

Damon felt his scalpel tingle.

He did not like that.

That sounded like a very elaborate way to get him killed.

He scratched the back of his head.

"So... can I get my Hero title, my holy relic, and be on my way?"

Their faces were hidden, but from their tones, Damon could tell they were eager to throw him into something catastrophic.

Child of War.

It was the same kind of title Seras Blade had received, right before she was deployed to the deadliest fronts of the Demon Wars.

'Great. I'm about to become a poster boy for war crimes.'

They quickly dragged Damon away to prepare him for his grand reveal as the Holy Child.

Deep within the Holy City, in a sealed chamber of the temple restricted to all but the High Templar and the Nine Elders, a man with golden hair opened his eyes from within a coffin.

"I sensed my brother's presence..."

He closed his eyes again.

That was impossible.

Because Lazarak was dead.

He had made sure of that.

#### Chapter 899: My Child

What was the Holy Child? To put it simply, there was no such thing. The High Templar had made it up on the spot. To put it simply, it was just a title given to Damon because he had seemed holy and embodied the goddess' divine power in the eyes of the High Templar.

Of course, Damon understood there must be some politics to all this, but at the same time the Temple couldn't just let him go.

One, Damon was a talent of this era, a prodigy in his own right, maybe even crazier than Seras Blade with how fast he sped through the ranks.

Second, Damon was famous. Though it was closer to infamy, but famous nonetheless. He was the grandson of the Grand Duke, so he was very well connected.

But the most important reason was the fact he had actually managed to absorb divine energy into his heart and not die.

The High Templar had to call the Nine Elders of Conflict, and by the time Damon came to, they had made a decision.

Damon should have been taken outside, but instead he was taken to a part of the Temple. When he entered inside, they offered him a golden seat, and someone came forward with a black box with countless magic seals overlapping each other.

He tried to stay calm, but he was almost bubbling with excitement. This type of seal, no matter what treasure was inside it, would be an overpowered holy relic. That would be great, because he wanted something to preserve his very life.

One of the veiled Nine Elders took it and created a magic seal with his palm, then opened it. Something flashed through, and Damon found it was—

A white fabric.

He blinked.

This was a holy relic? He paused for a moment, then decided to appraise it with his appraisal skill.

[Holy Shroud]

[Type: Holy]

[Description]

He had knelt for many years, paying for his sins and begging atonement. It never came. The statue of the goddess remained silent until the day Lazarak walked free from Eidolon. Convinced it was his divine task to stop the escaped god, he set out after him, with a heart shrouded by conviction, driven by confusion.

[Effect]

This shroud gives a holy aura to those who wear it. The stronger their divine energy, the holier they seem.

Damon didn't even know what to say. It was just a goddamn fabric looking holy. Why would he need that?

'It's a damn useless holy relic.'

It must have come from that wretch who was guarding the first floor of Eidolon. So that was what happened to him in the real world.

Damon took it with two hands with a solemn expression, while cursing in his heart.

The High Templar muttered a few prayers.

"You are chosen by the goddess. Take this Holy Shroud. Take it."

Damon nodded slowly and took the shroud.

.....

The Grand Duke stood in the Temple main plaza along with many honored guests invited by the Temple, as well as high clergy.

The number was even more than he expected. He saw quite a few familiar faces, even ones he didn't invite, like Seras Blade, who was here as well. For some reason, he figured she was invited by the Temple.

That said, what made him anxious was the fact that the Nine Star Elders, who were elusive, had all showed up, and Damon had been in there longer than a whole day.

The old man knew his grandson's personality. He was not the type of person to give people face.

He took a deep breath. If the Temple wanted to make things difficult for his grandson, then he would have to deal with them.

Regardless of the consequences.

He nodded slightly at an unassuming noble who seemed to be trying to curry favor with his family, but the truth was that was just one of the many forms Jarvis could take.

Just as he was about to step forward and question them—

A long line of women in white veils came out, singing hymns. What followed was a young man with dark hair and a crown, wearing a white shroud. He wore a white blindfold, as if he wanted to avoid looking at this sinful world.

His aura was pure and serene, but still fierce enough to represent war and doom.

It was as if this man was chosen by the goddess herself.

Everyone went silent as this solemn holy person stepped down the long steps of the Temple.

At the top, the High Templar raised his hand.

"I announce, for the first time since the Temple was founded, we have found the Holy Child we have been searching for, the herald of the new era."

Damon kept his expression calm.

This old man was truly shameless. Didn't they come up with the whole thing like half an hour ago?

"The Temple has searched high and low for the Child of War, the true Child of War, blessed of the goddess of doom and hero of the goddess races."

"Ladies and gentlemen, the Holy Child shall now give his blessings."

Damon didn't know how to react, but he had planned how to take advantage of this situation.

He walked up to the crowd. The first person his eyes locked onto was Xander Ravenscroft. He was here because his family was incredibly tied to the Brightwaters.

Stopped in front of him, even blindfolded, he could see. In fact, the blindfold was all him. No one asked him to wear it. He just thought he'd look better with it.

He slowly reached out his hand, with a low voice that seemed as if he was high on drugs.

Xander lifted his eyebrows.

What did he want him to do? His eyes moved to his fingers, where Damon was wearing a ring on each finger.

"My child... kiss the ring and get my divine blessings."

Hearing his voice—low and steady, pitched like a drunk eunuch—

Xander wanted to sneer, but the crowd were taken by Damon's overwhelmingly holy aura.

"Kiss the ring. Kiss the ring."

Xander gritted his teeth just to avoid trouble. This was the Holy Empire. He had to act in accordance to religion. He just didn't imagine a goddess-hating, religion-criticizing person like Damon would suddenly become a holy man.

He moved his hand and kissed Damon's ring.

Damon placed his hand behind Xander's head, holding him down with a thinly veiled smile.

"You are blessed, my son."

Next, he moved to Emilia Highgon, who was next to Xander. She sighed and just did it.

"You are blessed, my child. I see an ominous future with this one... be careful."

Xander winced but forced a smile as Damon moved on, blessing people.

The crowd of nobles were busy getting blessed by a seventeen-year-old with a history of theft, smuggling, and of course, mass murder.

But who cares? He had divine energy.

Damon reached Evangeline, who was standing next to their grandfather.

He nodded at his grandfather, who didn't even know what to say to his grandson. He really hoped Damon wouldn't try to make him kiss the ring and call him his son.

After a few moments of exchanging looks, Damon cleared his throat and glanced at Evangeline and Luna.

He offered them his hand without even looking at them. Evangeline held back the urge to hit him right there, but kissed his ring.

He placed a hand on her head.

"This... I see a very violent spirit within you, my child. Try anger management. You are blessed."

Luna didn't move. She didn't think he'd make her do it.

"Ahem. Ahem."

He reached his hand out. She knew she had to.

This person was her brother. When did he become so shameless?

She kissed the ring.

He paused for a moment.

"The Holy One demands you must kiss the cheek as well."

He leaned down.

Iris, who was next to her, glared at him.

That was not part of a religious ritual.

Luna just wanted this to be over with, so she jumped slightly and kissed her brother's cheek.

"Ahem, ahem... you are blessed. Good child."

He glanced at Iris. She grumbled under her breath and kissed the ring.

"You are a lazy child. Work harder. I heard your teacher is a supreme talent. Learn from his greatness. You are blessed."

She gritted her teeth.

He was her teacher.

He had just shamelessly praised himself.

Next, he spotted Lilith Astranova, who was trying to hide behind her father so he wouldn't make her kiss the ring.

Damon walked there, flanked by veiled women singing low hymns.

He reached out his hand to her. His eyes calmed at her chest slightly, and he took a moment to appreciate how good she looked.

Damon gave her his hand, rings glittering.

His smug expression was all she needed to know she had to.

"Tsk." She clicked her tongue and kissed the ring.

Damon cleared his throat and glanced at her chest. Lilith was a young woman with long red hair and a long green gown.

"Keep being bountiful... and may the one deserving continue to appreciate the fruits of your labor."

Her eyes twitched.

This bastard was just outright talking about sleeping with her.

Damon turned to Abellona, and after making things difficult for her, he finally turned his sight to members of the Temple.

He stopped at Father Dantalion and reached out his hand.

"Danny, my son... take my blessings."

Father Dantalion gritted his teeth.

He was an old monster. Now some brat was calling him his son.

Chapter 900: Into Difficult Times

No one had such audacity to call Father Dantalion Danny. In fact, it was unheard of. Who dared? No one... with the sole exception of Damon Grey.

His hand was still outstretched, and Dantalion had the small urge to cut it off, but reason and logic stopped him from doing so.

And of course, the consequences. The Nine Star Elders were spiritual leaders, and so was the High Templar, who acted as both Templar and Holy Emperor of the Holy Empire, although he was more of a spiritual leader.

That said, the real deterrent was the Grand Duke, who would not care and would level this whole city if his grandson was touched.

Not to mention afterward he could just claim he was acting to protect the Holy Child.

Dantalion slowly reached out his hand while cursing Damon's shamelessness under his breath.

Damon didn't seem satisfied. In the most shamelessly androgynous voice he could muster—

"Kiss the ring, Danny my son... kiss the ring."

Everyone was watching. Many people were here. He had to kiss the ring, even those other fanatics from the Inquisition.

He put down his pride and took the hand again, placing a kiss on the ring. As soon as he was done, Damon took out a handkerchief and cleaned the ring like it was the most disgusting thing ever. He cleared his throat.

"Ahem... you are blessed, my child."

He placed a hand on Dantalion's head, which was weird. Damon almost felt something before Dantalion moved his head back.

"Many thanks, your holiness."

Damon turned away, his gaze now landing on Aurelius Venn.

The dragon-kin almost wanted to spread his wings and leave, but he took a slow breath and sucked it up. He would make sure to make things difficult for Damon later.

"Venny, my boy... kiss daddy's ring... I mean, kiss the holy hand and receive the goddess' divine blessing."

He cleared his throat, even though he had just said what he said, and everyone was practically looking away.

Aurelius Venn bit his lips, then took Damon's hand.

Damon closed his eyes as if he was receiving some divine revelation.

"The goddess has forgiven you, Venny... you are blessed."

No one wanted to be next. Damon was making a spectacle of a holy event, but no one stopped him. He was, after all, the one the event was made for.

He was just about to return to the altar when he noticed someone.

Damon paused. His eyes narrowed. Wasn't this the priest the Temple had sent to buy his Ascendant armor back when he had returned from Lysithara? In fact, this man tried to make things difficult for Damon.

A lesser man would forgive him and be magnanimous. Damon was not a lesser man.

He paused in front of the man, pointing his hand in his direction.

"I sense evil energy around you..."

Damon just wanted to be rude. At most, he would be investigated, but they'd eventually let him go if he was innocent.

"You must be colluding with demons... I sense evil around you..."

The man's face paled when Damon said that. His eyes widened.

Dantalion frowned heavily, his gaze cold as ice.

Damon risked his life and rotated a bit of that divine energy. The Holy Shroud made him even holier.

"You are an enemy of the goddess. I see your truth laid bare..."

"Seize him," Damon commanded. He was the main character today; they had to give him face.

The Knights Templar who were there glanced at the High Templar, who slowly nodded. At most, they'd release him later and move him to another branch so the Holy Son continued being mysterious.

However, the priest's face tightened, his gaze filled with madness.

"Damn you foul people... you will never take me!"

He reached into his robes and pulled out a small ornament that seemed like a pendant. When Damon saw it, he was almost stupefied. It had the familiar symbol of the Unknown God.

As soon as it appeared, everyone's eyes widened with shock. Damon was even more confused. He was just trying to make things difficult for him; he didn't really think he would be a demon race spy.

He raised the ornament.

"Hail Unknown, the Unknown God."

When he said that, a barrier appeared around him, covering him in a circular dome.

He laughed wildly.

"Hahahahaha! You cannot harm me. I will chant the Unknown God's divine name, and when it's complete I will be sent to the Snake Temple..."

The Knights Templar raised their swords and sliced at the barrier, but it all bounced off.

"Hahaha, fools! Only those of the Unknown God's faith may pass."

He fell to his knees, clutching the ornament.

"All hail Unknown—

God of Names, Unmaker of All.

The Dreamer and the Void,

The Birth and the Silence."

When he spoke, the area within the barrier began to distort as if space was folding.

The High Templar gritted his teeth.

"Raise the holy barrier. This traitor must not escape alive. Seal this whole space."

When he said that, golden light seeped from the ground and shot up to the heavens. A large barrier sealed the whole Holy City with its golden radiance.

But it did nothing.

He continued to chant.

"Wielder of All Absolutes,

Bringer of Truth, Master of Lies.

Genesis Alpha — the First Light,

Nemesis Omega — the Last Breath."

Damon paused. It was surprising the Temple had a spy amongst them. This guy was clearly a human, yet he was a believer in the Unknown God, and he must have been quite high-ranked to be given this ornament with such magnificent power.

This was the ultimate escape tool for when your life was in danger.

He had to get it to preserve his own life.

His prayer did not stop.

"He who is the Law, and He who denies it.

He who dreams reality and wakes into nothingness.

The End of Ends, the Origin of Origins."

Then knights, mages, and whoever else bombarded the barrier, yet even with all their power it was like it existed in another reality. His escape was certain.

Space was now becoming illusionary.

"God of Wrath. God of Resentment.

Praise to the God of the Damned.

Hail the Lord of Choice."

Damon took a step forward and placed his hand on the barrier. There was no resistance. It would let him through.

He suppressed a smile. Right—he was still technically on the Unknown God's side, so he was one of the people this barrier would grant access to.

Before everyone's baffled eyes, Damon walked into the barrier.

"Unseen Sovereign.

The Silent Witness.

Discordia the Imperfect.

Hail the Paradox.

Hail the Abyss.

Hail Unknown, the Unknown God."

And he grabbed the priest before he could disappear. With a single action, he pulled out his sword from his shadow storage and stabbed his heart.

With his other hand, he took the ornament and shoved it into his shadow storage using the shadow of his palm.

"Ho... how did you get past the barrier..."

Damon was so lucky he asked naturally. He spoke loud enough for all to hear.

"The goddess is by my side, and she has given me the divine mandate of the heavens. I shall be the end of all heretics."

Blood spilled on the ground as the man's eyes faded in death. Damon got his revenge in the most unexpected way.

Meanwhile, everyone cheered for him. All those Knights Templar and followers of the Temple were now looking at him with awe, basking in his holiness as he stood in his white shroud, crown gleaming on his head.

Father Dantalion frowned deeply, but he kept his expression restrained. The High Templar walked up to the corpse, surrounded by Knights Templar.

"Where is his evil ornament..."

Damon closed his eyes.

"I'm afraid it must have been destroyed by my holy aura... evil things cannot seem to withstand me... ahh... goddess be with us..."

He shook his head slowly, as if disappointed.

"A shame. Who would have thought these evil people could sneak into our glorious and holy Temple? How dare they blaspheme the goddess' name and practice such heresy before your holiness, to boot. We must act to crush any remaining followers of that vile, no-good god."

Damon spoke with righteous indignation in his voice. Of course, he didn't forget to cast shade on everyone else and make the Temple crack down on its own people.

"We cannot tolerate such evil amongst us. I personally cannot abide that Unknown God and his corruption. He is truly the most vile and evil of existence."

This was his honest feeling, especially since the Unknown God liked to screw him over.

After all, he was holding a grudge.

"Indeed. Indeed," the High Templar said slowly.

"But how did you get past the barrier?"

Damon pressed out his holy aura.

"The goddess spoke to me... it was divine inspiration. Only the power of the goddess can overcome this evil, and I have been chosen."

The High Templar nodded.

"Yes, I see. I finally understand why the Aether Academy made the decision it did. The Temple will fully support them. Only someone like you can handle such a task."

Damon suddenly felt his danger sense explode.

"Huh? What?"

The High Templar placed his hand on Damon's shoulder.

"The Academy will fill you in... goddess be with you in your difficult times."

Damon was now utterly gobsmacked.