

Shadow 901

Chapter 901: Page

Seeing the academy gates, Damon had an ominous feeling, but even three days after the academy's resumption nothing happened. No one said anything, which made him feel as if the old High Templar was just pulling his leg.

Damon started to relax. He took a deep breath, sitting on a large picnic mat with Leona.

The beast-kin girl didn't seem to have a care in the world. She just ate a large pastry with gusto.

He shook his head. She was too relaxed.

"Hey, should you really be eating? We're supposed to be overseeing the entrance exam for the new students..."

Evangeline appeared in a flash of light, her face scrunched up in anger at the two of them having a picnic.

Damon glanced at her with a bored expression.

"Who is this chick... she kinda looks familiar..."

Leona, taking a bite of a creamy pastry and putting down her spoon, said,

"We don't have money. Go away."

Evangeline's face turned red with anger.

"I'm not a beggar..."

They glanced at each other.

"Hide the food... I heard people like these are like demon raccoons, always stealing food."

Evangeline walked up to them and grabbed both their ears.

"Listen up, you two. We have to make sure this exam goes perfectly. Our grades are on the line, and I'll have you know, Mister Number One on the rankings, we're second-years now, and I may reclaim my top spot..."

Damon pulled Evangeline into his arms so she'd stop pulling his ears. He brushed her hair aside, holding her face.

"Eva... that's never gonna happen. The people here love me..."

"No... no they don't. Everyone hates you," Leona said between bites.

"Shut up, Leona. Nobody asked you, and whose side are you on..."

Evangeline pushed herself off his chest, shaking her head.

"Be that as it may, we are still on a job. If anything happens and we lose the designated number of first-years, our grades will be halved..."

Damon shook his head.

"Don't worry, I got this. I've been watching this new crop of first-years take the exam, and besides, they aren't our academy's students until they pass..."

Evangeline nodded, knowing he wasn't taking this seriously.

"Iris is taking the exam..."

He nodded slowly.

"I know. She's strong enough to beat all those bums. I trained her myself... I have nothing to worry about..."

Evangeline nodded before dropping the bombshell.

"Luna is taking the exam too..."

Damon froze. He was just about to take a sip of his drink. He glanced at Evangeline.

"You jest..."

"No, I'm not. She's here..."

Damon's hands trembled just thinking that his sister was suffering. He reached for the charm in his shadow storage.

In a partitioned area of the academy, a small forest terrain had been created. It stretched several kilometers and was designed to recruit new students. The inside was filled with low-level green goblins and small monsters designed to be a threat. It was controlled, but death was a real possibility, and the academy

allowed it to pick out the cream of the crop. Of course, if your family was super powerful, they would act to save you, but officially everyone was equal.

That was why Damon and other powerful students were for saving the rich and powerful.

He wanted to hate on it, but he was technically one of the rich and powerful at the moment.

His voice echoed through the exam site.

"Testing, testing... everyone please stop what you're doing..."

His voice echoed through the exam site with the help of his charm.

Everyone stopped what they were doing... those who were fighting each other or monsters, everyone paused.

"Hey you, the one surrounded by five green goblins. Are you deaf? I said stop, or do you want me to disqualify you?"

The young man who was fighting the goblins was bleeding and clearly at a disadvantage. This person was being unreasonable. Maybe he could help him, but no—he was just observing, but for all that was happening he couldn't see him anywhere.

"As expected of Aether Academy, everyone here is a powerhouse."

"Are you deaf, boy? Yes, you—the one bleeding to death..."

The voice echoed out.

Damon got pissed and picked up a few cutlery spoons and forks, and despite the several kilometers distance, he killed each of the goblins.

The young man paused when he saw the goblins die. Mind you, he was in a forest and Damon was sitting far outside having a picnic, but still killed them accurately.

As if that wasn't bad enough, what followed next was his fourth-class aura that suppressed the entire forest.

Everyone in the forest was forced to stop, even the monsters. No one could breathe under this aura. All the shadows seemed to come alive.

"Ahem, ahem... thank you..."

He paused for a moment as everyone, even the monsters, was forced to listen to him speak.

"Now then, I'm sure it's your first time participating in this exam. Personally, I came into the academy without taking this exam..."

Everyone didn't know what he was talking about but still listened. He was powerful, more so than many professors that would be teaching them.

"Let me make one thing clear to everyone. There is a cute white-haired girl here with grey eyes and an adorable little face. That sweet angel is a blessing on this world and my little sister. If any one of you touches a hair on her head..."

In one corner of the forest, two girls were surrounded by a group of monsters and students in what had been a deadly free-for-all.

When suddenly, the monsters and students looked at one of the girls and slowly inched away.

The girl had white hair and grey eyes, and she had just been obliterating her opponents, and now... suddenly everyone was inching away, except the pink-haired girl her age who was next to her.

"Well, let's just say Aether Academy allows bullying... if you want to keep living peacefully, or even in this world, you'd treat my little sister like a goddess and stay out of her way. That includes you monsters too. I know you can understand me—I made sure of that..."

"What the hell are you doing, you bastard..." a woman's voice echoed out as well.

"Eva, what are you doing? Give that back... I have to make sure no one bullies Luna..."

"Shut up, Damon. You're causing trouble again. I swear, we had one job... one job..."

Their voices echoed until they faded away, but Damon didn't forget to leave one last threatening message.

"Mess with my Luna and you're dead... dead, I tell you..."

What followed afterward was quite a sight. Any students or monsters who ran into Luna did not want to fight her.

A student was fighting head-on with a monster, with a clang of steel and magic. Then Luna showed up. As soon as they saw her, the goblin shrieked, tossing its weapon away and fleeing for its life.

The student was a bit confused until he turned around and saw Luna standing there.

"White hair, grey eyes..." He paused, stepping back.

"Miss... are you Luna..."

She lowered her head. That was all he needed. He dived into the shrubbery and fled for his life.

Luna's face reddened. She felt like crying.

"Wait, please... fight me..."

Her face was quite adorable as she begged him to fight her.

Iris placed a hand on her shoulder.

"Desperation looks bad on you... just let it go and cruise through the exam..."

And that was how Luna ended up passing the exam.

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Damon stood in a chamber, facing the academy's senate, including the headmaster, his long beard still as full as he remembered.

"First of all... I can explain. It's not what you think. I was not breaking any rules... I was just acting like a good upperclassman. It was for their own good. Imagine if they bullied my sister... I would have m—I mean... ahem... I did nothing wrong..."

The headmaster sighed, shaking his head.

"Enough of that. It is of no consequence."

Damon let out a sigh of relief. They didn't mind.

Wait—if that was the case, then why was he here? What would warrant such a meeting with so many of the academy's upper echelon?

"The demon wars have officially begun, although at the moment no skirmishes or battles have happened between the two sides. For many years we have been the principal aggressors. It is unheard of for demons to declare war on us first..."

"And we ended up losing most of them. We never won, technically speaking. We invaded and they sent us retreating always, and when they did declare war last time they almost won. That was during Ashcroft's reincarnation," Damon spoke calmly, even though no one wanted to admit this.

The headmaster nodded slowly.

"Yes... that is unfortunate but correct. Now they have declared war again, and we cannot be caught off guard. To that end..."

He paused.

"Have you heard of the page program?"

Damon nodded.

"Yeah. It's a course taken by academy students. You go under a figure of renown to gain real-life experience, and it acts as your academy credit. Gather enough and you can graduate..."

"Yes," the headmaster nodded.

"We've decided to put most of you in second to final year in the program, and after talking with all authorities involved, we've decided someone of your talents would be placed in a vital position."

Damon waved his hand.

"No worries. I would cruise with my grandfather's army... better to stay with family."

The headmaster shook his head.

"Actually, that won't do... we are sending you to join Seras Blade on a special mission."

Damon suddenly felt his danger sense flare.

"Em... where?"

The headmaster looked away slightly.

"In the demon continent."

Chapter 902: Must Go

The page program was designed for the sole purpose of allowing the students of Aether Academy to gain real-life experience. It was a program you could enlist in from the second to final year, though for the second year it was optional.

However, due to the demon race declaring war, the academy had made it so that its more outstanding students would mandatorily be joining the program.

This was an opportunity for them to face harsh obstacles, gain real-life experience, and hone themselves.

That said, the current crop of academy students was just too powerful. With most of them having gone through the harsh gauntlet of the World Dungeon, they had reached the fourth class advancement without having any understanding of the previous ranks.

This was necessary for that reason. Most of the second-years and third-years would be joining the page program.

This was to strengthen their foundation and deepen their understanding of their newfound power.

And there was also the fact that the goddess races needed powerful fighters at the vanguard of its war.

Who better to send than those in the fourth class, able to level mountains and destroy cities?

That said, what was the page program?

It was just that: having young people act as pages for more powerful and more experienced individuals.

They would observe and learn. This should have been an easy program, since most students were backed by noble families. They would actually just return home and follow their elders in their day-to-day activities. Well, during times of peace, that is.

But in times of war, it was not so easy.

They would be going to the front lines.

Furthermore, it was also a way to build rapport. If you were lucky, you would be put under a renowned and famous person, learning from them.

Like a hero, a high noble, or a paladin, or even a grand duke or the king of a powerful nation. The possibilities were endless.

Damon didn't need any of that. His grandfather was a grand duke. He would just join his army and give himself a high-ranking military position by whining to his rich and powerful grandfather.

Was nepotism bad? Yes, when it didn't benefit him. When it benefited him, it was fair and righteous.

He didn't ask anyone to be born poor.

"Don't worry, Headmaster. There's no need to make a choice for me. I'll be in a difficult and dangerous war camp with my grandfather, who is at the peak of the seventh class advancement, and I'm his only grandson." He made sure to emphasize how powerful his grandfather was and how he was the only grandson.

"Yes, we know that..." the headmaster said nonchalantly, with a calm expression.

Damon nodded slowly, looking at the academy senate.

"Wars take years... you have to understand... I know the page program covers credit till graduation, but... you have to understand I have a family that loves me. I mean, personally I would be happy to go, but my family... they'd never agree."

He raised his head with a distant, sad, and heroic expression, as if it pained him the most that he was not out there risking his life for the goddess races.

"Alas, a hero like me, a legendary holy child... I must join my grandfather's army. I am a brilliant strategist. The old man, he needs me... ahh... too bad, too bad... anyway, sign me up to protect Lumos, the center of my grandfather's sphere of influence."

The old headmaster glanced at Damon. Lumos was the safest place. In fact, even if the demons invaded, it might not see a single battle.

It was almost impossible for an invading force to reach it unless the empire had fallen. Damon was practically asking to go home and enjoy his life.

"Yes, I knew you were a brave and fearless person... that's why the war strategists and all the upper echelon, myself included, the heads of different academies, the empire, the temple, and kings of various kingdoms advocated that you be put in this vanguard force."

Damon's eyes narrowed with suspicion. How did a small character like him get mentioned in a high-stakes meeting between the rulers of the world? He was a nobody. How... how... sure, he did some crazy things, but that was his past self. That version of him was young and suicidal. He didn't have any real-world experience.

He took a deep breath.

"Before I say anything... was the person who volunteered me the Elf King Kadelas?"

The headmaster glanced away awkwardly, stroking his beard.

"Well, he was one of the major advocates of this strategy and heavily insisted that a talent like you must be put in this operation if it is to succeed."

Damon bit his lip, nodding his head.

He chuckled.

"Hmm, I see... I only kissed his daughter a few times. I didn't even sleep with her.

I only called his wife hot one time... I only made his daughter fake a pregnancy one time... yet... how can he stoop so low... how can anyone be so petty... okay... okay... next time... I hope to run into his daughter... I'll send a message..."

The headmaster didn't even want to get involved in whatever this was about, and from how silent the rest of the senate was, it seemed they were making Damon his problem.

Damon glanced at him.

"Who else advocated for this... the empire... ah, I see... good, good... he has a daughter too."

He had no idea what Damon was planning, and honestly he didn't want to get involved, but he had one more thing to say.

"Your grandfather agreed too."

Damon's eyes widened.

"That old sleazeball. Fine, fine. He has a granddaughter too... well, he has two, but one is my sister, so I can't... you know what I mean..."

The headmaster held his temple, raising his hand to stop Damon. He didn't want to deal with this any more than he already had to.

"Anyway... Seras Blade asked for you, and since technically she was the one who vouched for you and your golden ticket came from her, your page program is tied to her, except if she refuses, and she clearly can't wait for you to join her."

Damon wanted to say something, but the headmaster waved his hand, and Damon was teleported out, with a small file in his hand that had a seal with a rune that said Confidential.

He hesitated for a moment, then read the first page.

He closed his eyes and looked up at the sun with a forsaken expression.

"I'm going to die."

Chapter 903: Ouroboros Coil

Everyone agrees on one thing, Damon Grey is too dangerous to keep in the rear.

He was an unpredictable person, yet also known for his arrogance and defiance, and yet he had not died.

Damon Grey was the man who did not fear kings. People said arrogance was in his blood, and he carried the Brightwater family's arrogance far more than anyone.

However, when he was arrogant, no one knew he had that bloodline. He was, at most, just an arrogant commoner, but that arrogant commoner proved to the world that he was walking a path to greatness.

He led his whole party out of a death zone, walked the legendary Path of Kings, and overcame it while he was unawakened. When they left those treacherous' lands, they had reached the first class advancement.

But that single heaven-shaking feat was just the beginning of his legend. He would go on to do something even more heaven-shaking.

According to reports, he ran into Princess Abellona returning from a quest. On her way back, taking a path through uncharted woods, she ran into Ashcroft, who had just returned. The Dominator wiped out her forces. However, Damon Grey showed up and slew the Demon Lord of Domination.

In a match of single combat, he did that at the second class advancement.

Damon Grey had many outstanding feats, and he did all this in just the period of one year.

Now, he was in the fourth class advancement.

"What a monster..." she muttered under her breath.

Naturally, she in this case was a woman with ashen hair streaked with red. She carried the deep scent of the battlefield on her body, a scent that did not seem to leave.

Looking into her eyes was like seeing all the violence and anger of war.

She was war personified into a mortal's body.

This was Seras Blade, the prodigy.

She glanced at a confidential file in front of her. This was troublesome. It was truly troublesome, and without a doubt even she could very well die on this mission.

Seras wondered if the high uppers were just too confident that she would be victorious as always, or if they had not accounted for the fact that this was a suicide mission.

"Infiltrate the demon continent, huh..."

That was hard, but doable. That wasn't impossible at all. Many would die, but it was still doable.

But the real issue was, of course, the next part of their mission. It was telling them to just die.

The mission had several objectives, but she only focused on the most important ones.

"Upon an encounter with any Ashcroft fragments, we are tasked with sealing or destroying them."

That was still reasonable, but that wasn't the actual mission, not by a long shot. That was just a side quest for them to fulfill if they encountered one of the fragments.

Their real goal was:

Infiltrate the Snake Temple, kill the witches of the Snake Temple, and steal... the Ouroboros Coil.

Seras Blade almost laughed. It looked like the goddess races wanted to repay the humiliation from when the demons stole the Ashcroft fragments the temple had acquired, but this was just too difficult.

Maybe normal people didn't know what the Ouroboros Coil was, but Seras knew all too well.

It was a known fact that when a demon lord died, their title remained the same for a new demon lord to inherit. An example of this would be when Grand Duke Brightwater killed the demon lord Adramalech. After his death, a new demon lord took his name and was called Adramalech.

This wasn't some tradition to keep the name of the demon lord alive. No, it was more than that, and it was because of the Ouroboros Coil.

It was a secret of the demon continent and those who knew were sworn into secrecy

This was a coil that had the power to transfer the powers and rank of a fallen demon lord to whomever inherited the title, including the powers and attributes of that demon lord.

This process instantly created a powerhouse of the seventh class advancement, but that's not all. They also inherited some of their knowledge and experience, and under extreme conditions, they might inherit the knowledge of many demon lords.

An example would be Paimon.

She had inherited the knowledge of all the demon lords who had been called Paimon and possessed all their vast experience, skills, spells, and knowledge all the way from the beginning.

"Asking us to steal this is suicide."

She knew that, but still, the strategy was solid. The main armies of the various goddess races would advance on the demon races while they snuck into the Snake Temple.

"I'm probably going to have to hold off Paimon."

It would be a deadly battle between the two of them, one she might very well die in. Paimon was usually the only one guarding the temple as High Priestess.

But she was also a demon lord.

The implications were not lost on her. The goddess races were planning to end it all. Should they succeed, it would mean the fall of demon lords was now permanent, and there would be no way for someone to inherit their power.

"They really want to fight the last war... seventh class advancement fighters on the battlefield."

The power to break a world.

"Where does their confidence come from? Is it because of the temple's hidden trump card... or is it... hmm."

Whatever the case was, it was pointless for her to try to figure it out. The top brass was taking a risk, and Seras understood the hidden undercurrents, the demons were also ready to end it all.

"I need to reach the seventh class advancement before the war reaches its final phase..."

She bit her lip. She didn't stand a chance against Paimon now.

Her gaze fell to a box sent to her by the temple. Even with that holy relic boosting her power, she was at a disadvantage.

"It's a shame I'll have to lean against this crutch, but against Paimon I'll need everything I can."

She opened the box and pulled out a sword that looked like it was made of glass. As soon as she held it, the faint, fresh scent of blood spread, and the sword began to fill with a red liquid. Seras felt her power growing.

Closing her eyes, she put it away.

"To war then."

Chapter 904: Book Holding Infinity

It was not in his best interest to go, but Damon couldn't really stay either. The rewards weren't really appealing, but he was bound to go to the demon continent anyway.

He also had things to achieve on the demon continent, one of which was finding any traces of Mugu the Wicked Prophet, as well as any information on the Pillar of Conflict.

That said, Damon had also been busy exploring the Tomb of Lesser Gods. His shadow drones had been making headway into the tomb, fighting and slaying monsters on their way, but they seemed to have reached an impasse.

It was a large door with hundreds of runes that refused to open, at least not without the keys. Yes, keys. In this case, it had three keyholes.

One was for the Key of Lazarak, which Damon and Lilith already had, and then there were two more missing keys.

He had a feeling he might find a clue in Lysithara, or maybe the demon continent.

Heading to Lysithara was dangerous, and he would rather not risk it, so he could only head to the demon continent.

Damon had spent days organizing all his trump cards, everything he would need to survive.

And so far, his best tool was not even the ornament he had gotten from the priest. It was the Book of Shadows.

The Book of Shadows was the system's cruel joke of a reward for killing Lazarak and completing the quest.

So far, Damon had not leveled up, because his level-up requirement was:

[Bloody Mary 0/1]

As usual, it was specific, but he had no idea what a Bloody Mary was. Still, the system always gave him obstacles he could find or would encounter, so he would no doubt meet whoever or whatever Bloody Mary was.

Damon's inventory was full. He had it all: potions, food, escape scrolls, barrier scrolls. He even went as far as buying some defensive artifacts, but that didn't make him feel safe.

So he took out the one thing that did.

It was a black book that seemed to be made purely out of shadows. Soft tendrils of darkness moved off its pages as Damon hugged it.

This was his trump card.

[Book of Shadows]

Type: Transcendent

[Description]

Every little thing about this new world filled him with wonder. He beheld colors no mind had ever shaped, felt sensations that once had no name, and breathed an air thick with quiet, ambient power.

This life was a blessing, even though the flesh he wore was a grievance against the heavens themselves. And so he recorded all that drew his gaze. In time, his writing no longer followed creation, it kept pace with it. He wrote of all that was, all that would be, and in doing so, his tome came to hold infinity.

All who gaze into the abyss of knowledge must remember:

the abyss will always gaze back.

What was once merely the journal of a child would one day be known across the omniverse,

not as a diary,

but as the Tome of the Unknown God.

[Effect]

Unknown captured a wandering shadow and folded it upon infinity, creating this wondrous tome.

No book compares to that original tome. Yet this volume remains noteworthy. Though it does not contain infinite knowledge within its pages, it instead stores infinity itself. Whatever creature's shadow is cast upon the book shall be sealed within, bound forever among its pages. Be wary, its power is only limited by its user.

Damon had tested what this book could do. When opened, it was just a book of shadows, that was all. Only shadows were inside.

But when he had tested it, he made a bird fly over the book, and when its shadow was cast on the pages, it was absorbed along with its shadow. On a page, the bird's image appeared lifelike, with its name and attributes written.

He tried this with inanimate objects, and anything with a shadow could be captured as long as its shadow touched the book's open pages.

However, there was a small issue.

If the entity was too strong, it could leap out of the book.

However, Damon thought of a solution.

"If I capture something and toss the book into my shadow storage immediately after, it no longer is within my control, so the book just traps them."

He held his chin, looking at the book.

That book had some kind of resonance with his shadow storage. This was Damon's trump card. As long as he touched your shadow with this book, he could seal anyone away.

As for its description, Damon had gotten used to such things. He wondered what kind of shadow the Unknown God captured and folded into infinity to create this book, or if the book was even alive.

All he knew was that this had come as a result of taking the life of his friend.

Damon didn't hesitate to use it, because in his heart, this was Lazarak trying to help him, and this way, he would always remember him.

With that final thought, he glanced at the ornament from the priest. He did not know its name and could not appraise it without putting his life at risk, but Damon could feel that it was a one-use item.

As long as he chanted the Unknown God's title and praise, he would be teleported to a specific location.

Which was not very helpful, because he had a feeling that location was in the demon continent.

"Basically, it's useless to me, but also not so useless that I can throw it away."

Damon took a deep breath and pushed the door open. The halls here were vast. After all, he was in the Brightwater family's estate.

He reached the plaza downstairs, where a group of hardened knights and mages were waiting. Each of them had a powerful aura.

Behind them were many armored knights and mages. The Grand Duke sat on a chair in a pavilion, the sun shining down, though it didn't matter to him since he was in the shade.

He smiled when he saw Damon.

Damon bit his lips.

They really were sending him to the demon continent.

"Damn higher ups."

"Figures," Damon sighed. "When in doubt, throw me at the demon continent."

Chapter 905: Through A Place Of Hardship

The sole objective here was simple, and that was choosing the people who would go with Damon.

They could not be of a higher rank than Damon, and he was allowed to choose a hundred soldiers to go with him as part of his own squad.

After some thought, Damon picked a balanced set made of fourteen parties, which consisted of ninety eight people, and then the final two were extra healers.

Damon made sure the parties were balanced. Tanks, archers, mages, healers, scouts. With each party having an average of two healers or two mages.

This was Damon's group.

After choosing them, each of them was in the third class, with the exception of the leaders, who were in the fourth class advancement.

Despite how dangerous it was, his grandfather had given him fourteen officers at the fourth class advancement.

But that did not make Damon feel any safer.

He bid farewell to his grandfather and sister, picked on Evangeline for benefiting from nepotism after finding out she would be joining their grandfather's army, and then took a teleportation gate to the academy.

He had no idea that was even allowed. He knew the academy had a private teleportation gate, but he did not think they would allow its use for the public.

After some thought, he realized this was a wartime situation, but the real question was:

"Why am I meeting Seras Blade in the academy."

Shouldn't they be taking a ship to the demon continent after a long arduous travel through the continent.

When he arrived at the academy, they followed a forest path that seemed to be heading toward the Evil Forest.

When he arrived there, he found a whole military camp right next to the barrier to the Evil Forest.

An adjutant was waiting for him there and quickly ushered him into a tent.

When he got inside, he found Seras wearing a light green tunic that seemed to hug her curves. Her hair was in a bun with a few loose strands as she pointed at a map on the table.

Next to her was the old headmaster, along with Damon's professor, Kael.

That was about it.

His entrance did not go unnoticed.

"You're late," Seras said without looking up at him.

"I'm not late, you're just early," Damon replied calmly.

Seras raised her head, then chuckled.

"This is a military structure, and by imperial orders you are my vice commander, which means I outrank you."

Damon sighed, shaking his head softly.

"Yeah, I got it."

She frowned at his lack of respect for military protocol.

"That will be commander to you."

Damon nodded, walking up to the table.

He greeted the headmaster and Kael with a nod.

"So what's our strategy. How are we supposed to get into the demon continent undetected with a thousand men."

Damon pointed at the map with his hand.

"I mean, if we leave through the capital, we'll be traveling through the Golden Road before we reach the sea. Many kingdoms will know about us and our mission."

He moved his hand to the more dangerous patches of the map.

"If we travel through the uncharted lands, we will be more secretive, but the possibility of running into adventurers in different regions is high, and it will take months to navigate those regions without crossing through the Golden Roads. And should we take the shortcuts, we'll still be seen, especially after we cross several nations' borders as an army illegally."

Damon gave several analyses of why their mission would fail before it even started.

After the land hurdles, they would have to go through the hurdles of crossing the sea.

Seras sneered and let him speak.

Assuming all of these did not fail, they would be sitting ducks in demon territory.

Seras crossed her arms.

"I'm glad you figured all this out, but no one said we'd be taking any of these paths. We considered all these problems a long time ago, and after much thought we found a safer, well actually not so safe but better way."

Damon suddenly had an ominous feeling about where he was standing and why they had come to the academy.

With a dead expression, his hand shook.

"Son of a bitch, you want us to go through the Evil Forest."

Seras crossed her arms over her chest.

It was the only viable option that kept secrecy, but it was also the most dangerous. The Evil Forest spread all across the continent, all the way through different nations and even to the sea.

The idea was to travel through this known death zone, past its heart, all the way to the other side.

This was an abominable place, as bad as the Whispering Forest. Just thinking about it made Damon's hair stand on end.

Once again, he would face a deeply traumatic experience before the mission even truly began.

"Can I go home now."

"No, you can't," Seras cut him off.

What happened to that devil may care attitude of his. This was not how she knew him before.

Damon turned to the headmaster.

"Something tells me you won't be coming with us."

He shook his head.

"No, I will be here. However, Kael will be going with you as your supervisor, as well as one more student."

Damon winced in disgust.

"One more student. You guys are letting one more student come on this mission."

The headmaster stroked his beard.

"Actually, she volunteered after seeing the files we gave you, so it's technically your fault."

The headmaster looked up.

"Ah, she's already here."

Damon didn't even need to turn around to sense her familiar shadow.

He glanced at the violet haired young woman through his shadow perception and rolled his eyes.

Renata. Of course she would be interested in going to the demon continent. She was, after all, a demon.

"Wait, what about Lilith. She isn't coming," he asked.

Renata shook her head.

"Nope. It's just me and you this time. But don't worry, I'll be sure to take good care of you."

Damon sighed, looking at the lineup.

"When do we leave."

Seras glanced at him.

"Now. We leave now."

Chapter 906: New Companion

Stepping into the Evil Forest was something Damon had not done in a while. As a student of Aether Academy, he was always close to this evil place, but he had never gone to its inner region, and he had hoped he never would.

Alas, life did not care what the future held.

The last time he was here, he was almost mauled to death by an Evil Forest Wendigo, which eventually turned into a pretty girl, but that's not the lesson here. The lesson was that it was not a good place to be.

Actually, no, that wasn't it either. The last time he had come here, he had been hunting an Evil Forest Wendigo but never found one, so he caught a squirrel instead.

He had quickly left, but now it seemed that wasn't going to be the case.

All arrangements had been made, and they were setting out into the Evil Forest.

They soon passed the small river not far from where Damon had found a fragment of Ashcroft's shadow and gained the system.

When they reached the dark shade of the forest, the soil turned black. The scouts in front stopped and armed their weapons.

"Who goes there. Show yourself."

Damon lifted his head with a sigh. Did she really think they wouldn't sense her. This whole unit was specially designed for this mission. Seras had experts with experience in the Evil Forest in her army, and Damon's grandfather only allowed people with such skills and knowledge to even show up for selection, so they knew this place and how to survive it.

One of the knights moved closer to protect Damon, but honestly, it didn't really matter. If he was in actual danger, he'd know it.

Besides, he knew who it was.

A young woman with dark hair stepped out, holding a bone sword. She had a squirrel and a raven on her shoulder. Each of them had the aura of the fourth class advancement.

The woman was naturally Wendy. She had been the Evil Forest Wendigo before she turned human.

As for the squirrel and raven, they had undergone some changes. The raven had grown a third eye and a third leg. Its eyes were hidden on its forehead, so it was hard to see unless it opened them, and the new leg could also be hidden.

The squirrel was just faster now. Far faster than Damon could catch. They could both grow several meters if they wanted to, but this wretch had gotten used to living off Damon.

"What do you want, Wendy," Damon asked with a bored expression.

She crossed her arms with a serious expression.

"All men are dogs, but you must be a dog's dog. You really think you can have your way with me and just leave."

Damon felt everyone's gaze fall on him.

"Huh, what. I was the victim. You. Fine, fine. What do you want."

He really was the victim. She had shown up in his room at a very bad time, and well, he didn't really resist. More than that, she had pulled that off several times that week. He had reached his limit and gave in.

She pouted her lips.

"I want to come."

Damon sneered, his face smeared with disdain.

"No. Get out of here. You're in the way."

She glared at him again.

"I want to come."

"And I said no." Damon shook his head slowly.

"I know this forest more than you. I lived here, so let me come."

"Still no." Damon waved his hand dismissively. If he let her come, she'd keep pestering him to have a child with her. He was already feeling bad about what happened that night. It was a one time thing, and he did not want to think about it.

He had even tricked her into keeping it a secret.

She pouted, her face turning red with anger.

"Fine, don't take me. I'll just go tell Lilith what ha—"

"Welcome aboard, Wendy. I couldn't go on this mission without you," Damon cut her off as he heard the muttering behind him grow louder.

"The vice commander is truly a man amongst men."

"To think he has the audacity to go sleeping around when he has another woman."

One of them glanced at Renata, who was quietly glaring at them both.

"He already has that beautiful adjunct, now he wants to add another woman. As expected of a noble. Philandering with such finesse."

Damon really wanted to cry, but he had to keep his cool.

He glanced at Seras Blade.

"Erm, Seras. I mean, commander. This young lady is a specialist when it comes to the Evil Forest and has spent years here. I would like to bring her on as my special advisor on matters related to the Evil Forest."

Seras rolled her eyes. This wasn't the first time a soldier wanted to bring a woman along, and it wouldn't be the last.

"All men are scum," she muttered.

"I really don't care about your private life as long as it doesn't affect the mission. Having more people die is fine by me."

Damon nodded, then turned to the expedition unit.

"I know all your names and faces. If I hear rumors. Well, I'm sure you've heard of Jarvis before."

Everyone went silent before they started swearing to the goddess that they'd keep the secret.

Jarvis was that terrifying. He was, after all, an assassin with a thousand faces and was loyal enough to Damon's grandfather that he would kill anyone if Damon asked.

"Good. I'm glad we're on the same page."

Seras waved her hand.

The expedition unit began to advance into the forest. The moment Damon stepped onto the familiar black soil, he felt an eerie atmosphere surround him. Everything here was hostile, from the fauna to the flora.

Seras turned to the expedition unit.

"We have entered the Evil Forest. From this point forward, even I can't guarantee your lives. However, we have experts here who are familiar with the forest and its monsters. It will be wisest to keep them alive. Scouts, advance, but stay within a set distance where we can help you."

She gave out a flurry of orders.

Damon glanced at the forest's dark dome, then ordered his two pets to scout ahead.

The raven and squirrel were reluctant, but after a cold glare, they left.

The objective before they advanced was to find a few nocturnal stags to act as mounts. The reason for this was simple. These creatures were faster and had a better understanding of the terrain. They could be used as mounts to carry supplies.

That explained why Seras brought people with the tamer class.

However, Damon imagined she didn't really plan to use them for long. After all, the inner forest was more dangerous.

"She wants us to save our strength before we reach the inner forest. Damn it, that is not a good sign. What the hell is in that place."

Whatever it was, he had a feeling he would find out.

It wasn't long before the tamers received messages from the scouts and began to move.

About half an hour later, they returned with several nocturnal stags. The last time Damon had seen one of these dark creatures, it had been trying to crush him with its hooves. Now, it was just a mount.

After half a day, they had all gotten a stag for themselves.

And so they set out with the intention of finding a good campsite before it got dark.

Wendy didn't want to mount a stag, so she shared one with Damon, claiming she knew a good campsite. She and Damon were at the front of the expedition.

The Evil Forest at this point was still within the realm of what they could handle. Monsters of the first rank were spotted here and there, but none of them dared to attack.

They soon found a clearing in the woods, just in time, because the sun was not far from setting. In the forest, it looked even darker.

Seras ordered the expedition to set camp there and prepare to march tomorrow. It was the best time to rest, because the next stretch would be even more dangerous.

Damon's men began to arrange his tent, but Damon stopped them. He didn't need that.

He reached into his shadow storage and pulled out a tent.

This was, of course, Abellona's tent.

"You guys rest up."

The leader of the units nodded and began setting up their own tents.

Damon walked into the magical tent and collapsed on the sofa.

He was exhausted, more mentally than physically.

Renata and Wendy joined him in his tent. Even though Damon knew it would stir up more rumors, he didn't really care.

Renata walked into one of the rooms, and after about half an hour she came back with damp hair.

She was wearing light nightwear.

Damon glanced at her, then looked away.

"You do realize this isn't a vacation, right."

Wendy stood up and went to take a bath too.

Renata glanced at her with a teasing smile.

"I know, but it feels like one. The Evil Forest isn't as dangerous as I thought."

Damon quickly tried to stop her, but ended up pushing her down onto the ground, ending up on top of her.

"Don't jinx us."

Before he could finish his sentence, the tent's flap opened, and Seras was standing there, looking at him pinning Renata down.

She sighed.

"Every day you stoop lower than I thought."

Damon looked at the compromising position.

"I. This. It's not what you think."

Chapter 907: Something Bump In The Night

It was quite a sight to have three beautiful women in a tent with him in the dead of night, but Damon couldn't really feel happy about it.

In fact, he was feeling uneasy. Yes, that was the word, uneasy.

Seras came to his tent, and once again he was caught in a compromising position with a young woman, but he didn't let that bother him.

What did was Seras coming to his tent.

"What... what do you want," he asked with a nonchalant expression.

She shook her head.

"I was thinking of killing you, but after the war games you did impress me, and here we are. You know why I'm here, don't you."

Damon took a moment to think about why this woman would be here in his tent.

He glanced at her up and down, then closed his eyes.

"You're about the same age as my mother."

Seras narrowed her eyes when he said that.

Then he smiled.

"That's totally fine, because I like 'em old enough to birth me."

Seras's face scrunched up further in disdain and disgust when she saw his expression.

"That's not why I'm here. I came here because you're the only one with a functional bath in this godforsaken place."

Damon paused. He smiled, realizing his mistake, but he couldn't back down now.

"Ohh... ohh, sorry. You were giving mixed signals. I sort of thought you like 'em young. I figured you've been single since ancient times, so you'd want to experience a younger guy. I... my bad, my bad."

He stopped himself when he felt a cold killing intent from her.

Seras crossed her arms.

"I should have killed you when I had the chance. And I'm not that old. If anything, I'm actually quite young."

"Whatever you say, aunty."

She grabbed his neck, crossing the distance in an instant.

"Say that again. I dare you," she whispered coldly.

"Cough, cough. I wasn't trying to be rude. I just mean you were friends with my parents. If my mom was still alive, she'd probably make me call you aunty, and I'd remember you fondly as the big-breasted aunty," he squealed as she crushed him.

Her face scrunched up further, a cold smile on her face.

"Congratulations, Damon Grey. It's like every time I spend time around you, I feel my anger grow. Fine, fine. You chose suffering."

"Ahhhhhhhh!"

An ear-piercing scream shook the air, but it did not come from Damon. It came from outside the tent.

Damon glanced at Seras, who let him go as he dissolved into the shadows. Then he slid out of the tent after Seras.

They found the members of the expedition force all armed to the teeth with weapons, carrying glowing artifacts and illuminating the dark forest as if expecting something to appear, but Damon sensed nothing.

A few members of the unit were crouched down around someone. These people were obviously healers, their magic attempting to save this person's life.

Knights and mages with barrier magic formed a circular perimeter around them. Damon and Seras approached.

When Damon reached them, he noticed it was someone from the nine hundred Seras had brought. This man was clearly a priest. Damon had not noticed since he was wearing armor and didn't carry any sign that showed he was with the temple, but apparently the temple had contributed people to this expedition as well.

There were thick black veins on his face. His breathing was shallow, and strange black marks were moving around his body.

Damon glanced at Seras, her expression cold.

"He's been cursed." He crouched down, looking at where his armor had been pierced. Something had done this, but it wasn't any monster Damon recognized.

"Did you kill the monster that attacked him," he asked, but it was obvious they didn't. What Damon was really asking was whether they had seen it.

And sure enough, it was as bad as he thought.

"We didn't see what did this," one of the knights said, looking into the dark forest.

Damon glanced at Seras.

"This man wasn't one of the night watch, which means he was in the inner part of the camp. Yet something managed to sneak in past all of our senses and take out one of our people."

Seras crossed her arms, her expression cold.

"Whatever it was must be very intelligent. It didn't kill him when it could, which means it's not gone yet. It must have the goal of slowing us down, knowing we won't leave one of ours behind to die."

Damon narrowed his eyes, his danger sense tingling.

That was the worst type of monster to encounter. No, a horror. That was what these types of intelligent entities in death zones were called. A monster was different from whatever this was.

Damon was about to say something when Seras raised her hand to stop him. She crouched down next to him and leaned closer, her face stiff, her eyes serious.

"Do you hear that," she whispered slowly, just loud enough for him to hear.

Damon didn't hear anything. The forest was silent. Completely quiet. Not even the sound of night critters.

His eyes widened with realization.

The forest was quiet.

She whispered slowly.

"The forest. It knows we are here. It's watching us. And this is just the beginning."

When she said that, all his hair instantly stood on end. In that moment, Damon felt the same eerie sensation as waking in the Duhu Mountains with all the abominable horrors there watching you.

At that moment, Damon felt a gaze. Something was looking at him from the side, in the darkness, as if urging him to look its way, telling him it was there.

No one could see in the darkness. No one but Damon.

His eyes were of shadows. His heart was bathed in shadows and illuminated by the darkness of Lazarak's divine spark. There was no darkness he could not see.

And when he looked into the darkness, it stared back.

There, in the tree line, right under the trunk of a large tree, it gazed back at him.

It was tall.

No, it was hunched.

It was close.

It was far.

It was looking at Damon.

He was looking at it.

At that moment, it was as if only the two of them existed.

Then Damon blinked.

It was gone.

Yet still there.

Seras noticed his gaze, but when the lights shone, all they saw was an old tree, like one of many in the forest.

Chapter 908: Stalker

Seras frowned when she noticed Damon's gaze still remained there even when the lights had revealed nothing. Even she had a vague feeling something should have been there.

"What did you see," she asked calmly, her eyes gazing around the area with a sharpness like a sword.

Damon stood up slowly, his eyes narrowed.

"Something, that's for sure. But for the life of me, I couldn't tell you what."

She nodded slowly. That was unusual, but this was the Evil Forest after all.

"I see. I didn't expect we'd run into one of the abominations of the Evil Forest so soon. We let our guard down."

Still, anything was better than nothing. She turned her gaze back to the dark tree line, where even shadows seemed to be consumed by an unending darkness.

"What did it look like, from what you've seen?"

Damon glanced at the man who was breathing heavily but still unconscious.

"It was one of those things that mess with your perception. It seemed tall, but hunched too. When I looked at it, I could feel its breath on my face. It was so close... and still it was far enough that my sword wouldn't reach it."

She nodded as Renata stepped into the defensive circle.

"Hm. It must be a creature with a conceptual-type attribute. That's not rare at all in places like this. When dealing with these kinds of entities, they bend the rules of the world and operate under esoteric laws."

She sighed, crossing her arms.

"I've read several Academy reports on this forest, and I can say without a doubt, this whole thing is alive. The forest doesn't like us, and it will try to kill us at every turn."

Damon wasn't surprised by that. It was like the Whispering Forest, except unlike that place, the Evil Forest was constantly being explored.

"The Whispering Forest has rules, actually, a lot of them. But the most important one is never letting the forest know your name."

"Does the Evil Forest have such a rule," he muttered.

"No. Not really. The Evil Forest has many rules across different regions, and those rules change depending on the season. The forest also births different entities at different times, from the thoughts and fears of those who step inside. This place has quite the nasty collection."

She placed a hand on her waist.

"The farther you go, the lower your chances."

Damon gazed at the black soil of the Evil Forest, the oppressive darkness, the sense of something watching them, his own heartbeat syncing with the silence.

"If that's the case, doesn't that mean our own fears can birth monsters of unimaginable proportions?"

Renata nodded slowly.

"It can, but this place is ancient. There's nothing we can imagine that hasn't already been imagined by someone else. That isn't something to worry about."

"For now, we should wait until morning, then keep moving," Seras added.

"The closer we get to the inner region, the more powerful they become, and the less time we have. At least half of our total number of units will die before we reach the ocean on the other side."

Her words were cold and merciless, making the expedition force visibly shaken with fear, but she knew exactly what she was doing.

"If you don't want that to be you," she continued, "then I suggest you keep your wits about you. Death is lurking everywhere."

Everyone saluted, and it was as if they became more vigilant instantly.

She glanced at a young woman examining the injured man.

"What did you learn," she asked.

The woman had green hair and brown eyes. She looked like an elf, but clearly wasn't native to the Verdant Continent, she was from one of the elven tribes of Soltheon.

"I think we're dealing with a stalker."

When she said that, Seras's eyes flickered with annoyance. Damon figured from her reaction that it was something troublesome.

"A stalker, huh." Kael walked toward them, wearing light armor and surrounded by a few knights he had taken scouting after the attack.

"Did you find anything," Seras asked.

Kael shook his head.

"If we're dealing with a stalker, we wouldn't."

Damon turned to Seras.

"What's a stalker?"

She held her temple, genuinely irritated.

"Something troublesome. It's a horror unique to the inner forest. They're very few in number, but we've had enough encounters to record them, just not enough to actually know how to kill them."

Kael glanced at Damon with the look of a professor correcting a wayward student.

"These entities are virtually unkillable as long as they are being observed. To that end, they are similar to Weeping Angels, another type of entity I hope we don't encounter. Though these are different. Unlike the angels, they can move even when observed."

Damon frowned, biting his lip.

"So they can't move if they aren't being observed by something. It doesn't even have to be human, right? How do we kill something we can't even observe?"

"If we observe them, we can't kill them. And we can't kill them without observing them. What a paradox," Renata muttered.

Damon glanced at the young elf woman.

"If you have records, that means someone survived one before, right?"

She shook her head, fear evident on her face.

"In most instances, the target of the stalker used instant teleportation scrolls or greater teleportation magic to escape. The best method I know of is sealing magic, seal it away."

Damon took a deep breath.

"Sealing magic... I doubt sealing something like that would be easy or permanent."

Seras nodded slowly.

"Yes. I agree. We'd just have to kill it."

Damon agreed. He would have to figure out how to kill something that couldn't be killed while being observed.

There had to be a rule that allowed it to die.

"It already attacked, so it probably won't attack anyone again tonight."

Plup.

Someone fell to the ground at the edge of the campsite. Something leapt off a branch and vanished.

Seras glanced at him, frowning.

"You were saying?"

Damon's expression turned cold.

"I'm definitely killing that thing."

Chapter 909: War Cry

At this point it was now already a habit trying to figure out how to kill something or someone.

Damon had expected something horrible to happen to him the moment he entered the evil forest, but now this creature was targeting his expedition unit.

They had not even reached the battlefield and their numbers were being whittled down by something.

This was the seventh time they had changed formation in a period of two days.

Yet the stalker had already gotten ten people and still nothing worked. It was too fast and only targeted the weaker ones.

It had not killed anyone yet, only placing a curse and disabling them, causing them to be slower and spend a lot of healing potions to sustain them.

How obvious was it going to be. If they abandoned them to die just to spare a few potions their morale would plummet to an all time low.

Still, Seras had not made a decision yet. Instead, she just made them continue as is.

Damon nudged the nocturnal stag he was riding towards Seras, his voice low enough for her to hear.

"Do you have a plan?" he asked, wanting to know that at least the leader of the expedition had a plan.

"Whoa, why would I tell you that. For all I know the real Damon may be dead and you are the stalker."

Damon scoffed with disdain.

"Good to see you are in the mood for jokes. At least your life is not in danger. Even if everyone here dies, you will live."

Seras smiled, tilting her head.

"Right, that is true. I am at the peak of the sixth class advancement. I am almost a seventh class."

She placed a hand on her chin.

"As for a plan, well I have not gotten one. You are free to come up with one if you like."

Damon closed his eyes as the stag huffed softly, the radiant beams of the sun struggling to shine past the argent canopy of ancient trees.

"Fine, then help me lure it out."

Seras shook her head.

"There is no need. It has been watching us from the trees for the past three hours."

Damon stopped, his hair standing on end as he glanced around in the trees, his shadow sense spreading outward further.

"Stop that. I do not know if you are using magic sense or something similar, but I would not if I were you."

Damon shook his head.

"I do not have magic sense. You only unlock that at the fifth class, right."

"No, the peak of the fourth class actually. That is not the point here. Did you forget where we are," Seras spoke nonchalantly, as if she had not just given him a warning that had saved his life.

Damon gritted his teeth.

Right, what was he thinking. This place was dangerous. Just as Seras had sensed he was using some kind of perception, this forest would have monsters that could react and even retaliate to his shadow perception. He had experienced something like that in the Whispering Forest.

"No need to feel bad. It is not called a stalker for nothing," Seras muttered, adjusting her sword slightly.

Damon gritted his teeth.

"If I manage to lure it out, can you try killing it?"

She shook her head.

"That will not work. We do not have a weapon here that can kill it."

Damon nodded, raising his hand.

"Yeah, yeah, I know. Just try. I want to experiment. I just want to see it close up so I can figure out a weakness."

Seras did not stop her stag. Her face was calm, a thin smile forming on her lips.

"If you were hoping to impress me with your bravery, then I am impressed. Something tells me your plan is simple, dumb, and something that can end very badly."

Damon chuckled as sweat flowed down his head and a coldness touched his back.

"How did you know?"

She glanced at him, her eyes carrying a small glint.

"You have the expression of a brave idiot."

Damon took a deep breath. This was the only way he could think of. If it went as badly as he knew it would, he could die. Every instinct was telling him no. The curse in his heart was making him reject this idea.

Oddly enough, it was also the same curse that was telling him if he did not try to kill this stalker, he would die.

Damon took out two twin swords. These were the relics of the Halls of Steel. They had tried to take them, but Damon did not give them back, and after some talks between the old man from the halls and his grandfather, they reached some backdoor agreement.

"I will go scout ahead," Damon said loudly, and his stag marched off through the shrubs and trees of the forest, trampling the deadly flora.

Renata did not hear the plan he came up with. She raised her hand.

"Wait, do not split from the group."

She tried to go after him with some knights from House Brightwater, but Damon raised his hand.

"Do not follow me. That is an order."

His voice echoed as he disappeared into the woods.

Damon did not know if it was following him, but he had to risk it. He was unsure if he would even stand a chance in single combat against it.

He traveled about three kilometers through the woods when he suddenly felt his danger sense make his whole scalp tingle.

Damon stopped his stag and found himself standing in a small bough in the woods. The plants were green and grew a few meters off the ground, covering the black soil. The trees made it easy to ambush him here.

The nocturnal stag seemed agitated, as if it wanted to flee from this area. It kept kicking its hooves.

'If this goes bad enough I am dead.'

He could not think about it. Just because he was cursed to persevere his life did not make him a coward.

'Our situation cannot be worse than it already is.'

Even Deathless could not throw more than this at him. He had survived so far. He would not die.

He closed his eyes so his other senses would be more heightened. Then he heard it rustling in the woods and he turned around with a slash of magical energy, but there was nothing.

When Damon looked to his side, a wood spike that seemed to be made of twisted black branches stabbed into his side. He shifted off the stag as the nocturnal stag was kicked into a tree, its body splitting open from the impact, blood and organs flying everywhere in the air and dropping on the plants like rain.

It did not even cry out before it died.

Damon did not even look in its direction as a dark energy began to move through his body, but he resisted due to his resistance to curses. He unleashed a flood of black flames toward where it was even before he saw what it was.

He crossed the distance in the flames and slashed down at the creature. When he did, it blocked his sword. It felt like it was hitting an immovable object.

He looked at its face, but there was no face. It was just a tree. No, it was not. It looked like a treant, but it was not. It was as if it was made of smooth bark with cracks in it, but it was also flesh.

He was touching it, but he was not. It was right next to him, yet there was a gap that was greater than space between them. It was as if it existed in another dimension of reality that he could not touch, almost the same concept of a drawing on two dimensional paper not being able to touch a three dimensional surface.

Damon was a three dimensional creature trying to interact with something just not in the same quantum dimension.

"I hope you like fire."

He unleashed a torrent of flames as he felt his shadow energy dwindling, the barrier he created in his heart with shadow energy, the two opposing powers in his heart swelling.

He felt the flames break into its dimension, or whatever it was that kept them apart, but it was too weak to kill it. Damon kicked off.

All this was just in the span of a single second, and right on time he saw Seras appear in front of him.

However, when Damon saw her, his danger sense only grew louder. She swung her sword towards the stalker, but Damon was the one who felt danger.

He turned into a shadow right as the blade was about to hit him. He threw one of the silver blades at her, or was it.

And the blade passed right through.

"Tsk," Damon clicked his tongue. Figures, that was not Seras. It was actually the creature. There were two of them. Of course that made sense. This was a creature that could not move if it was not observed. Then the answer was simple. It just needed to be observed. However, it could not observe itself. Then the answer was even simpler. What if there were two of them. They just needed to observe each other and they would be free to move.

Damon saw its sword, which looked like the plain tachi Seras carried, driving towards his neck.

"Damn it."

He was screwed just before the blade ripped into his neck.

A tachi swung down at it.

"Not bad," Seras Blade came from next to him.

"Looks like my guess was right. There are two of you."

Damon's eyes widened as he saw her cold, dead eyes. She raised her sword, pulling him close to her.

"War cry."

That was the last sound Damon heard. What followed was a deafening sound that shook the very soul.

Chapter 910: Fields Of Roaring Glory

There was a wave that traveled through the forest. It was almost as if there was a silent explosion within the space they existed in, but its destructive noise was focused on a whole other plane of existence.

Seras brought her sword down. The two stalkers were stunned in place by her attack.

She sighed, lowering her blade slightly.

"That should have killed any creature in the fifth class advancement, especially after a direct hit, but they're still alive."

Damon glanced at the two creatures. They were still alive and struggling to regain control of their bodies.

They moved almost simultaneously, escaping from the stun effect, but Seras wasn't worried. She raised her tachi and sliced down. The world seemed to bleed out colors as if space itself was torn by her attack. The thin slice went right through the bodies of the two stalkers. The destructive power should have ripped them in half, yet they remained still.

As soon as the attack stopped, they regained movement and tried to escape from Seras.

"Hmm. These things really can't be killed with conventional methods. As long as they are being observed, they can't be killed."

Damon paused for a moment.

"Observation..." he muttered. His eyes widened. Of course, that was it. Their powers were observational, which meant their weakness would also be.

He grabbed Seras's arms as the creatures scrambled to escape her.

"I have an idea. Can you make them stand still?"

She glanced at them fleeing her, then took a deep breath.

"If I use my domain, I could make them stand in place. That's a serious risk since we are in the evil forest."

"Yeah, yeah, I know. Whatever comes later, we'll deal with it. I can't sleep at night knowing these things are out there."

She smiled at him, then her eyes flickered.

"Whatever future troubles we face, just know this was on you."

[Fields of Roaring Glory.]

Damon suddenly felt the world shake. From her feet, the black ground began to bleed red. The sky was covered in ash and dust. Screams echoed out and battle cries filled the air. Airships carrying banners of war flew overhead and blasted magic into the ground. Hundreds of warriors of different races battled in a chaotic maelstrom.

"This is my domain. The battlefield. Within this domain, my strength increases greatly. Like many domains, my core attribute is strengthening, and I gain a higher capacity for mana and its restoration."

She raised her hand as the soldiers and warships in the sky turned toward the two stalkers. Countless weapons filled the air as attacks were unleashed at them.

In the sky, weapons formed and attached around them. Chains formed and bound them. The two creatures could not move.

Damon looked around. The forest was gone. He was now on a battlefield standing next to Seras.

"A domain is representative of what a person has comprehended. A culmination of their philosophy, their life. At first it starts out as an idea. Some people don't even know they've grasped the idea. As time passes, it becomes solid and manifests in physical form. Within your domain, you are its god, the master of this dominion. This is an authority you possess."

Damon felt an enormous amount of mana. This was the second most refined domain he had ever seen. It was different from Lazarak's domain. His was just darkness, but that darkness was gentle, almost like a calm night. It freed you from pain and created a sense of serenity.

The Mirror Seraph's domain was a world of fogging mirrors.

Seraph Null's domain was chains and imprisonment.

Each entity had a domain unique to them, because no matter how similar they were, no two domains could be the same.

That idea of a domain was why the Beldam was so terrifying at the fourth class advancement.

He glanced at the two stalkers, and just as the chains held them, one of them moved its mouth. Then something spread from its feet.

When it did, Damon felt as if it was now existing in a whole different dimension.

This was a domain too.

Seras chuckled.

"You do realize you've trapped yourselves too, or are you hoping I'll run out of mana first?"

Damon's eyes narrowed. That made sense. No wonder only one of them used its domain. They wanted to exhaust Seras. That was the reason powerful entities didn't just spam domains. The mana cost was enormous.

It had to be, since they were creating a literal sphere of influence within a world.

'It should be easier for gods, since they are part of the world.'

Seras glanced at him coldly.

"Well, what are you waiting for. Do your thing."

She muttered slowly.

"While my domain allows me to recover mana faster, it still costs more to sustain."

Damon noticed a bead of sweat on her forehead. It couldn't have been from dealing with them. While she couldn't kill them, they weren't strong enough to make her struggle.

His gaze fell on the edge of her domain. He noticed something encroaching on it. The black soil of the evil forest. The forest was attacking her domain.

This was fundamentally different from the Whispering Forest, which allowed the Beldam to create a domain around her home. Or was it because this domain was temporary and mobile, not fixed.

Damon was so interested in domains.

"Damon!" Seras called out.

He cleared his throat.

"Right, right. Sorry about that."

He slid down and turned into a shadow, gliding toward the two stalkers. As soon as he reached them, he smiled coldly.

"I figured you out..."

The two stalkers were bound in chains. Damon reached into his shadow storage and pulled out something.

It was a mirror.

It wasn't a magical mirror or some powerful tool. It was just an ordinary mirror.

Damon raised the mirror and pointed it at the faces of the two creatures. They looked into their own reflections.

When they saw themselves, their bodies froze and began to break down, shattering like glass and falling apart.

[You have slain Stalker of the Evil Forest.]

[You have slain Stalker of the Evil Forest.]

Damon glanced down as their bodies turned to ash.

Seras let out a sigh of relief as her domain collapsed on itself. The warriors fighting faded. The weapons. Everything was gone.

The forest returned, but now Damon felt something different. The evil forest felt even more hostile, as if it was actively radiating killing intent.

"How did you figure out how to kill them?" Seras asked, not minding the killing intent from the forest.

Damon shrugged.

"It was a guess. I figured this wouldn't be the worst thing I face in the forest. I'd say this was more like an opening to terrible things to come."

Seras glanced at the forest with a serious expression.

"The forest's authority has been challenged. Now it's active, and what is gone. We may have gotten rid of the stalkers, but now we'll be dealing with worse."

Damon turned to his side and noticed one of the scouts approaching them. He glanced down at his wound and saw that the stalker's curse had faded.

Seras turned back.

"Let's go. We need to leave this area quickly."

She disappeared into the woods. Damon followed as he felt his danger sense flare in short bursts.

He chuckled and made sure he was using Dethrone to suppress his Deathless skill.

They rejoined the group, and as soon as they did, they noticed the injured soldiers were now well.

Damon had lost his nocturnal stag. They didn't have time to catch another one and tame it, so he mounted the same one as Renata, and the expedition force did the only logical thing left.

The ground all around the forest began to tremble. Roars and strange sounds that resembled laughter echoed out.

Some of the sounds he didn't recognize. They felt incomprehensible to humans.

Damon's hands grabbed onto Renata's waist.

"Seras, what now?" he yelled over the noise of hooves crushing shrubs.

"That's commander to you. We're going deeper into the forest. Stay together and kill anything that comes close."

Damon sighed, feeling more unlucky than usual.

He turned his head back and saw the trees shaking and roars coming from around them as swarms of strange looking imps began to jump down from the trees.

Damon winced, holding Renata tighter as they galloped through the woods.

"Hmmm. It's not as bad as I thought. It's just some imp looking creatures. Nothing much."

Just as he said that, he heard a loud crash. When he turned back, he saw one of the giant trees bend and break, but he didn't see anything.

He narrowed his eyes. One of the imps was lifted into the air and then crushed with a crunching sound as something chewed on it.

Something huge. Something invisible.

Damon paled. As if it wasn't bad enough that something was after them, it was also invisible.

"Dammit. Dammit"