

## Youko Backstory

**Name:** Youko (in the current day; born Damian Tzavaras)

**Species:** Human

**Sex:** ♂

**Age:** 42 years, and “on the upper side of young”

**Height:** 5ft 9in

**Weight:** Not given

**Siblings:** None

**Home:** The Conjured Isles

**Quote:** *“Do what you love, and you’ll never work a day in your life. So I don’t do what I don’t love doing. Not anymore.”*

### Cultural Notes

The culture in which Damian grew up demanded that children “respect” their parents, especially those born into nobility. “Respect”, in the context of Damian’s family, meant complying exclusively with his parents wishes. Their greatest wish was for Damian to “ensure his legacy” by furthering his parents’ political and business standings throughout the Conjured Isles and beyond.

Youko is a human from the Dungeons & Dragons setting. He is the son of two social climber parents who cared more about status than love and affection, but was raised by a nursemaid who was far kinder. He is a loving and friendly character who loves the arts in all their forms, and appreciates integrity and kindness in others.

### Trust & Confidence

*(newborn)*

Damian was born to a wealthy and powerful family. His mother and father (named Master and Madame Tzavaras) were interested in status to a fault, and saw him as a means to gaining better status for themselves. As such, they left his rearing to their nursemaid, an old dwarven woman named Bana.

This was the cultural norm for their region, and Bana, well-attuned and sensitive to his needs, made a wonderful carer for Damian. She was an experienced carer as it seems that the infant Damian did nothing to unduly surprise her, and he experienced his care as very safe, predictable, and warm.

### Freedom & Self-Determination

*(toddlerhood)*

Bana anticipated that as Damian grew into toddlerhood and developed a sense of self-determination, of the desire to exert his own will on his destiny and the world, that he might have difficulty with his parents, perhaps severely so. She was correct – that is to say, she would have been correct if she had not intervened – and her foresight helped Damian to get through his childhood with far more ease, even grace, than might have otherwise been the case.

Although the concept of personal autonomy is straightforward enough in itself, Damian's circumstances meant that Bana had much work to do, to support him for the duration of his time as a toddler in the ways he needed.

Bana couldn't change Damian's parents but she could offer him a safe, secure, and warm relationship herself. She gave him just such a relationship, one he could be so certain about that he would never have to be afraid of feeling unloved.

Firstly, Damian would develop his own personal attitude about holding on, and about letting go. Bana understood that if he felt emotionally impoverished during his toddlerhood than he could later become needy, possessive, even cruel in his holding on of others, or that he would isolate himself in a way that could be disastrous both in his 'professional' life – that is, the life in which he would be expected to live up to his parents' expectations – and his personal life. If neither of those things happened, she anticipated that he could still become manipulative. Again, she intuited his need for a secure, loving base, and provided it.

Damian's parents began to impose their will on him even at this early age. However, he had no great difficulty with this as a toddler as all he wanted to do was please his parents. They, as family, were naturally important to him.

Despite Damian's parents denying his individuality, he developed a strong sense of it anyway thanks to Bana's skilful care. In his youthful inexperience he sometimes expressed wishes even as a toddler that did not mesh well with his parents', and he had a few moments of self-doubt over this. However, Bana was there to help him reconcile this and to offer him a source of love nonetheless. Damian healed from this and in the longer term became a very self-assured child and adult. In fact, he came to prefer Bana's company to that of his parents.

He delighted in his early discoveries and achievements and eagerly shared them with Bana (and sometimes with his parents too, but of course he invariably got a warmer reception from Bana). She was never short on praise and he accepted it with the same sense of joy with which it was given.

Bana did well in her rearing of Damian, and as an adult he treasured the few relationships outside of those prescribed by his parents that he was able to find, so long as the other person proved themselves by accepting him as he was. However, he retained something of a sore spot for those who betrayed others or who abused their power.

### **Ambition**

*(young childhood)*

Damian wished that he could be more visible to people other than Bana. Bana fulfilled his need to be seen, but he sometimes wished that his parents and their visitors could really see him for who he was. To be seen as an idealised version of himself (as opposed to his authentic self) was stifling and felt to him like being locked inside a cage, however spacious and luxurious it happened to be.

Despite this sense of feeling trapped he managed to avoid acting out. This may have been due to the region's culture when it came to family: children, the culture said, lived to please

their parents. The idea of actively rebelling was not foremost in Damian's mind. As an adult Damian became conscious enough of this that he complied only as a means to an end: he complied to get what he wanted, however, as a child, it was just "the done thing".

Damian was a curious and very energetic child, more so perhaps than his parents had expected. He began to find the "family first" value more of a strain as he started to want to explore and pursue friendships outside of the family. All of that meant that Bana was busy for much of each day keeping up with him as he ran around the house. She maintained that he kept in her in good health!

His energy was not entirely welcome as far as his parents were concerned, as they did not appreciate an unruly child running around the house. Between them, Bana and Damian channelled his energy into performing in a way that his parents found more acceptable: by being enthusiastically sociable and making something of a performance out of this.

As such, he became very adept at cooperation: with his parents, with Bana, and with the people who he met.

Given the ambitions that Damian was pressed to have (and the fact that not only were they demanding, but mostly difficult for him to make sense of as a small child), he did not develop any ambitions of his own, and simply lived to enjoy the now.

### **Productivity**

*(older childhood)*

As Damian grew older, his parents began to arrange tutors for him, and this was where he experienced the first conscious desire to rebel against his parents' will. It wasn't this way initially, as at first he complied with his parents' wish for him to sit down and listen to his new tutors as per his conditioning. It didn't take him long, though, to realise that he had little patience for the subjects they were there to teach him.

However, the story was different when he was tutored by bards in the arts of art, architecture, music, and theatre. He loved these subjects and took to them like a cat to sunshine!

Damian's tutoring happened at home and he studied alone for most of the time. His parents watched over his shoulder for much of the time to make sure he was shaping up the way they wanted him to, and to find way to use him to build their empire. As a result he was very aware that what he wanted from his life, and what they wanted from it, were worlds apart.

### **Child to Adult Transition**

*(adolescence)*

Even though Damian was passionate about the arts, his parents decided who got to be in his social circle. The only social choice Damian was able to make was in relation to how much time he spent with Bana. He chose to do this either on a one-on-one basis or they would go into town, where he would meet with a village girl named Lilia, who had once shared her dress with him.

Damian had many lovers but didn't tend to develop romantic relationships, except for those put upon him by his parents. However, he did become fond of Lilia.

As he gradually moved on from childhood and learned what being an adult meant to him personally, his authentic self began to come to the fore. However, he could not allow his parents to see this so the face he presented them became more and more of a mask. Only Bana and Lilia got to see his genuine self. At some point along the line, he came to think of the self he presented to his parents as a deliberate act.

Part of the reason for this act was that he could see how much Bana's employment depended on him being brought up the way his parents had wanted: what they wanted from their nursemaid was a finished product that they could use to further their status, after all. To protect Bana, Damian complied with his parents' idealised image of what they wanted him to be, at least while he was in their company.

Damian saw Bana not only as his carer, but also as a role model. He felt her values were good ones, and adopted them to use for himself. As such, the people who got to know the real Damian were struck with his warmth, supportive gentleness, and loving nature.

When Damian was around 18 he had a nasty experience that changed his life. One evening his parents entertained guests, and these guests mocked Bana and had her beaten nearly to death "for fun". When Damian saw this he implored his parents to do something about it but they were unconcerned for Bana's welfare and interested only in entertaining their guests' whim.

Bana did not survive for long after this, and died within a few days. This was when Damian finally realised how heartless his parents truly were.

Recent to this event, his parents had been arranging for him to marry the daughter of a wine trader on the Northern islands and he had been trying to avoid being trapped into this arrangement, but had begun to realise that this was not possible. Although he enjoyed her company and genuinely liked her family, he and she both understood that marriage would not make either of them happy. Damian stayed with his parents for long enough to bury Bana (which he did that himself, as his parents didn't care about their dead nursemaid), and then he ran away.

He travelled the Conjured Isles for a couple of years, meeting many new people and trying on different identities and personae himself. He learned much about his authentic self – as well as his ability to play different social parts.

Damian missed the sense of permanence that Bana had provided. In the pursuit of some kind of anchor in his life, at one point Damian had a set of documents forged so that he could visit the wine merchant family without alerting his parents to his proximity. This involved forging documents and identities for an entire fake family for himself.

After this visit Damian travelled on and eventually went to the mainland. Within a few days, in the coastal city in which he made landfall, he was beaten and robbed by a group of thugs. Then, in the midst of the battle, a monk stepped in and laid the robbers low before walking away. Damian was so impressed with him that he followed after the monk and begged him to teach him how to defend himself like this.

Perhaps the monk would not have accepted if Damian hadn't begged particularly loudly

and been as persistent as he was. The monk made it clear that if Damian was to train with him he would have to travel with him going where the monk went.

Damian was happy to do this.

### **Closeness in Relationships**

*(young adulthood)*

The monk introduced himself as Xeras, and for ten years Xeras travelled through Drafael with Damian in tow. Xeras would train and Damian would copy him, learning the art of self-defence as he did.

Xeras' "take me or leave me" attitude towards Damian had enough of a similarity to Damian's parents' "our way of the highway" approach to him that at times, he became combative towards Xeras. Damian had developed enough as a young man during his travels that he had begun to master the art of negotiating for what he wanted, and the fortitude to walk away from any situation that didn't suit him and was not salvageable. Since Xeras simply did not do negotiation, Damian had some difficulty adjusting.

However, unlike Damian's parents, Xeras asked nothing of Damian in return, and wanted only to provide for, and better, himself – without using Damian to reach that goal. Although Damian felt a long-standing need for warmth from those he considered his caregivers, guides or mentors, Xeras' integrity was enough for Damian to stay and continue to learn. Sometimes he tried being combative with the monk to get the emotional warmth he craved, but Xeras remained steadfast, neither giving nor demanding. The bottom line was, Damian was welcome to follow him and learn from him, but would need to be the one to choose for himself to train based on his observation of Xeras.

Xeras was not completely indifferent to Damian, however. During their time together Damian developed something of a romantic interest in Xeras, although how much of a connection Xeras felt in return is unknown. Xeras' primary focus was on travelling, improving his skills, and helping those in need, so at the very least he remained committed to these goals in favour of any relationship. With this said, they may or may not have slept together at some point during their travels.

Damian took what he needed from this relationship with Xeras, and when he felt capable enough of protecting himself, he left Xeras to his travels and went his own way.

Damian continued to travel on his own, and now, with his training, he felt capable of protecting himself from bandits. Aside from this, his acting skills gave him plenty of roles to fill. He felt free.

Eventually however, he found himself in a new kind of danger.

He visited a capital city along the western coast, and during his stay there, heard a rumour of a coup being planned by one of the city's nobles, a woman named Estasia. Damian felt that the coup, involving an assassination, was unjust so decided to help by getting close to Estasia and stopping the coup from coming to fruition.

He charmed his way into her inner circle, and then her bed.

However, she had recognised what he was doing and was already several steps ahead of him. On the night before the assassination he sneaked into her estate to stop her, but she was awake and waiting for him. She surprised him by revealing herself to be a powerful sorceress, and she transformed him into a form that could do her no harm, either personally or politically: that of a fox, with snow-white fur and bright blue eyes. Then she tried to kill him, but Damian escaped.

He fled the city and tried to live as an animal, but he lacked the skills and quickly realised that as a mute animal, he was as isolated as he had ever been. He fled south and on his travels, was caught in an animal trap. All seemed lost.

This was when he met Enari. Enari found him, saved him from the trap, and took him to her home. She seemed to understand him even without words, since she was not much of a talker herself.

Without any clue as to his original name, she named him Youko.

Youko, by this time in his life, was aged 34. He lived with Enari and her grandparents for three or four years, until their home was burned down by gnolls. After this, Enari took to travelling with a group of companions, and Youko joined them for two years.

The group of companions' primary goal was to stop a plague of Goo that was infecting their planet. They journeyed to a land called the Riddle Vale, a region shrouded in fog and mystery. To the best of anyone's knowledge, nothing that went into the fog ever came back out.

The companions went into the fog. While they were inside, they were ambushed by doppelgängers.

The Riddle Vale was, in fact, a land taken over by a marid (a water genie) named Omishtal, who lived in luxury and protected his kingdom with a magical fog that kept his captives trapped within the city, and hid it from outsiders. Omishtal had seen Youko, thought him a beautiful treasure, and had decided to add him to his city's treasures.

He ordered his doppelgängers to seize Youko, dispose of his companions, and put him among Omishtal's other treasures for safekeeping. This is what transpired, and when Youko arrived in the hoard he desperately tried to communicate with Omishtal that he wanted Enari and his other friends rescued. Given his human heritage he was far more expressive than any fox Omishtal had seen before, and Omishtal understood that it would not be right to keep him.

Omishtal recognised, and was able to break, the curse on Youko, and he did this with nothing but a mere gesture.

With his curse gone and in human form once more, Youko turned on his best charm and bargained with the genie to let him save the woman he loved and the friends who had travelled with them.

Omishtal granted him his wish.

In the present day, Youko was a well-regarded adult and was respected, even admired, by most people he met. His years of complying gracefully with his parents, coupled with the

genuine love, affection and support he had been given by Bana, had turned him into a charming individual skilled at influencing people to fall into his corner – and to walk away from him happy to have met him. His knowledge and skill with the arts often entertained these people, and he had become a savvy tradesman to boot, once the conversation turned to business.

Sexually, Youko is very open, free, playful and does not emotionally connect with those who he has these uninhibited relationships with.

Youko is less likely to seek a romantic relationship but when he does, sex takes a back seat, as he is more interested in developing a deep bond based on his authenticity than any kind of performance, which sex can be for him. For him, an authentic relationship like this is nothing short of sacred, and he treats it with all the reverence he has to offer. This is not to say that he is wholly pleasing in such a relationship. He is *authentic*, meaning that he lets his lover see the good, the bad, and the ugly, for better or worse.

He has only had this level of deep intimacy with one man (Xeras), and two women (Lilia and Enari).

### **Passing on Responsibilities**

*(older adulthood)*

Youko's upbringing put him off of building a career, and as an adult he has always taken far more enjoyment from being a living work of art. He would prefer to live – and to die – that way than build something for any children to take over in his dotage.

On the subject of children, Youko has no intention of having any. The only legacy he wishes to leave on the world is the warmth and positive influence he has on every relationship he has with others.

### **End of Life**

*(old age)*

Youko does not fear death. When he finally became human again he was no longer young, and let that fact go without bitterness.

For Youko, all he wants is to end his life knowing that he was kind and that other peoples' lives are brighter for having interacted with him. For him, life is about the child to whose rescue he came during a zombie attack, or a girl who was able to proudly show her parents a coin purse full enough to feed them for a month, or a sad, lonely person who, for one night, felt loved and cared for. That is, and will continue to be, enough for Youko.

### **Credits**

Youko is © Eliza Droesch, aka [@eliza\\_panda](#) on Twitter

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Dungeons and Dragons created by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson

*Based on theory by:*

Erikson, E., (1951) 'Childhood and Society', W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. chapter 7.

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Want to organise your updates and talk with me about integrating them into your character? Email me on [thecharacterconsultancy@gmail.com](mailto:thecharacterconsultancy@gmail.com) and I will be happy to help you!

~Hayley, The Character Consultancy