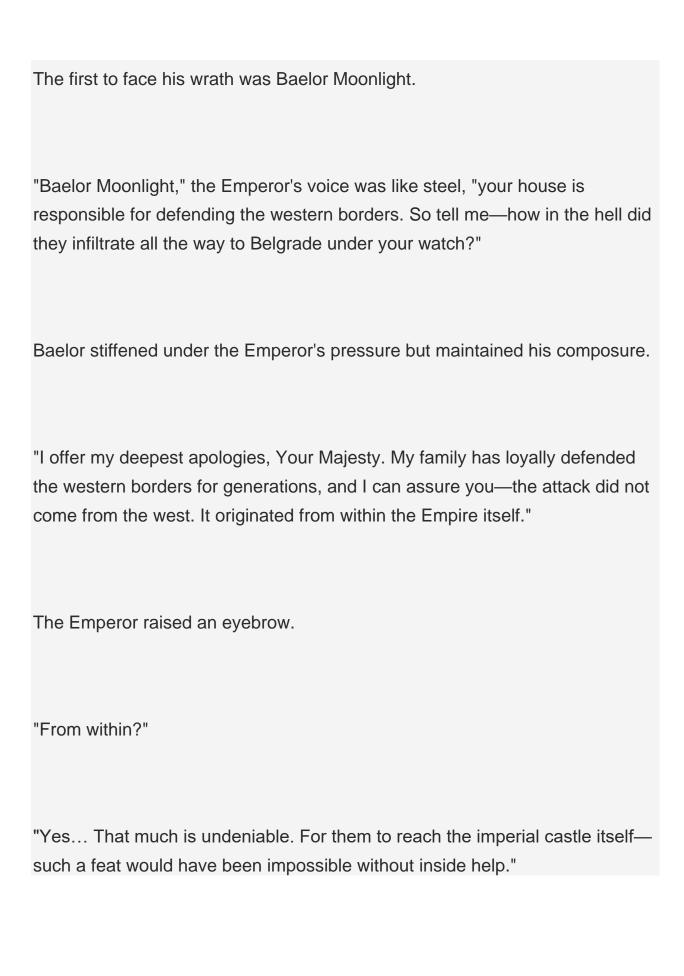
## THE VILLAIN'S POV

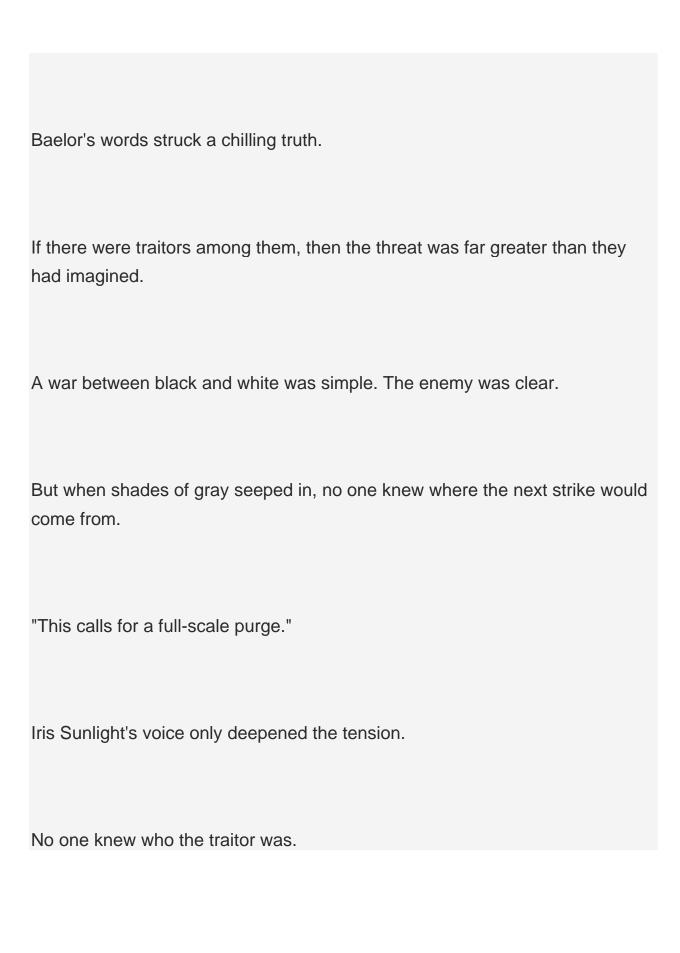
## Chapter 20 20: The True Beginning (2)

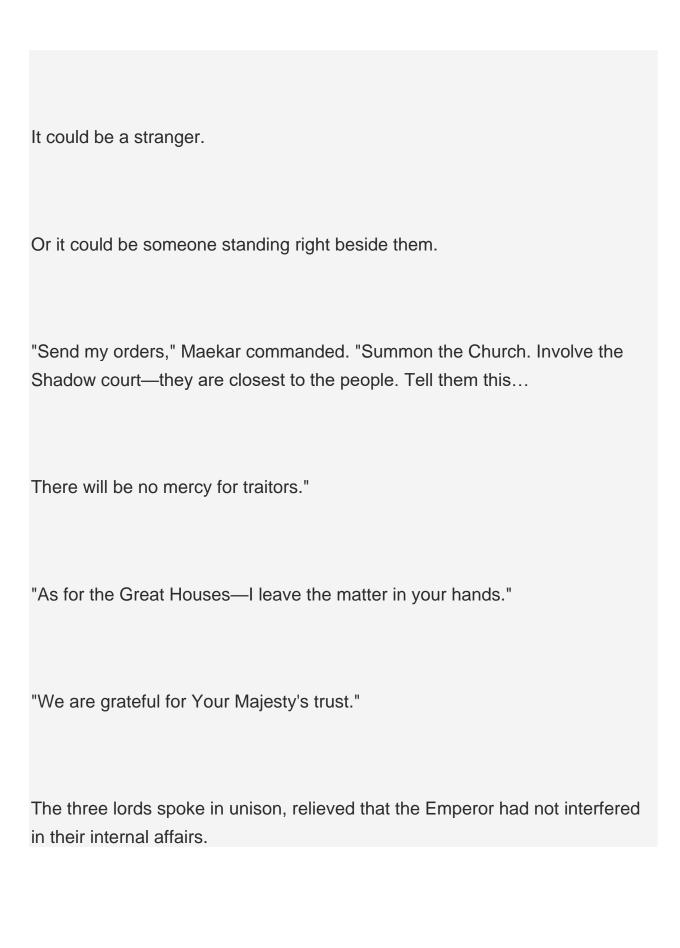
At once, everyone took their seats.
This year had been far from peaceful.
After all, the Ultras had made their boldest move yet.
The Valerian Empire stood at the heart of the world, its eastern and southern borders shadowed by the Nightmare Lands.
But the west was a different story.
Beyond the ocean—once called the Atlantic—lay a continent formerly known as America.

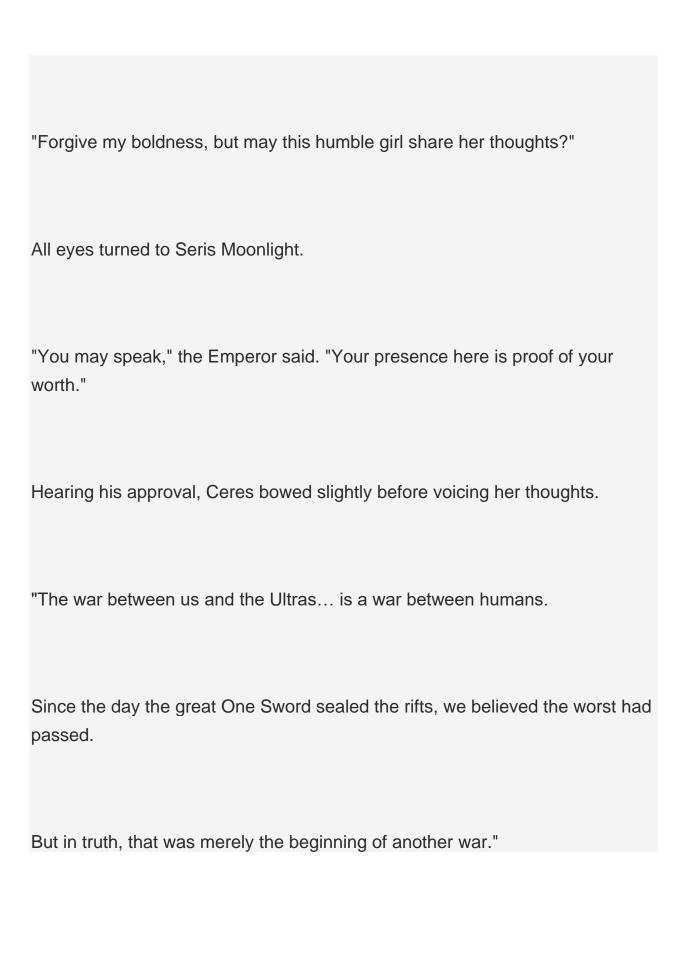
Now, however, it had become home to something else entirely.
The humans within the Empire were not the only survivors of the old world.  Not everyone had embraced the idea of humanity's salvation.
To the west, there were those who had forsaken their humanity, selling their souls to demons in the belief that it made them stronger.
They had abandoned their mortal nature, forging pacts with a sinister entity. These beings had become the Empire's greatest enemies ever since the One Sword sealed the rifts long ago.
The factions that had aligned with demons eventually united under a single banner—a force known as the Ultras.
A few months ago, the Ultras made their boldest move yet.

They infiltrated deep into the Empire, abducting not only the Empress and her daughter, but also several high-ranking officials.
It was a catastrophe—an undeniable humiliation. The imperial capital, Belgrade, believed to be an impenetrable fortress, had been exposed as vulnerable.
If the royal family itself was not safe, then how could anyone else be?
The entire Empire was thrown into turmoil.
In the end, after an extensive campaign personally led by Emperor Maekar, they managed to rescue the princess and some key figures.
But the Empress was not among the survivors.
That was the moment Maekar's fury reached its peak.



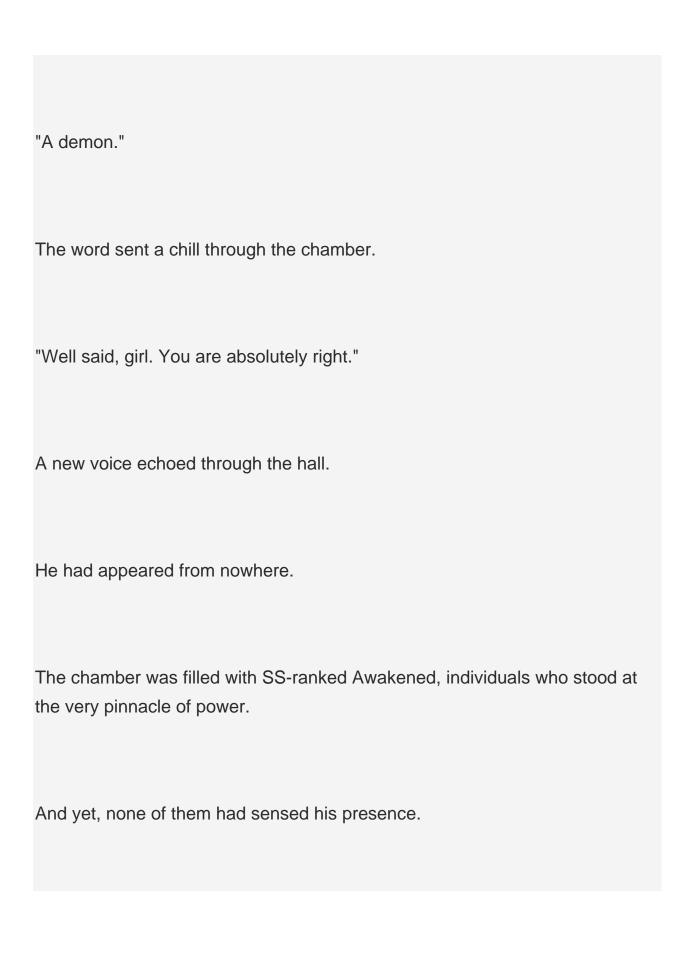


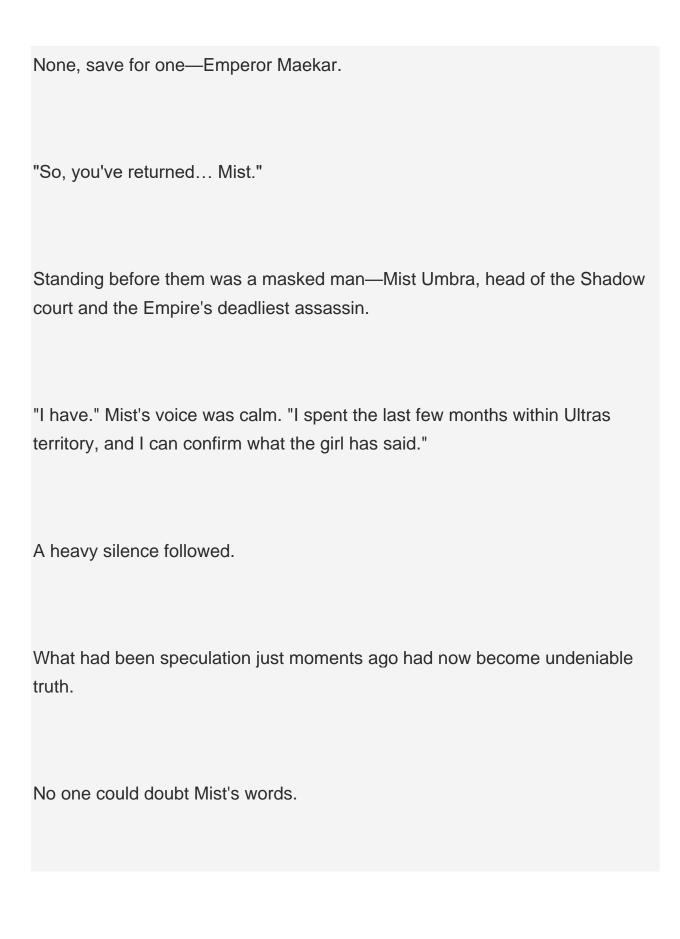


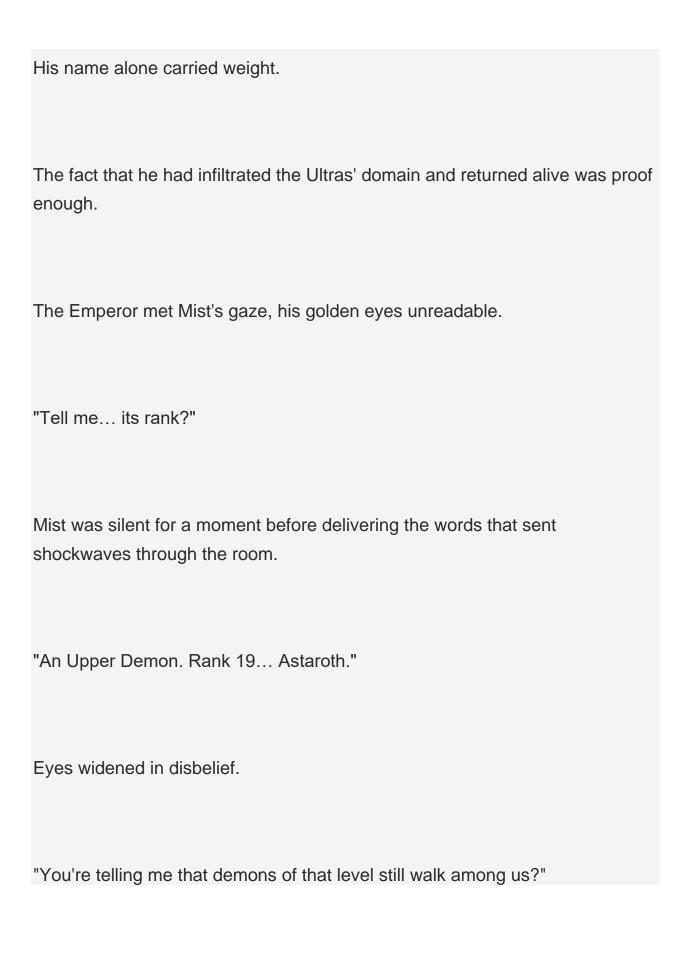


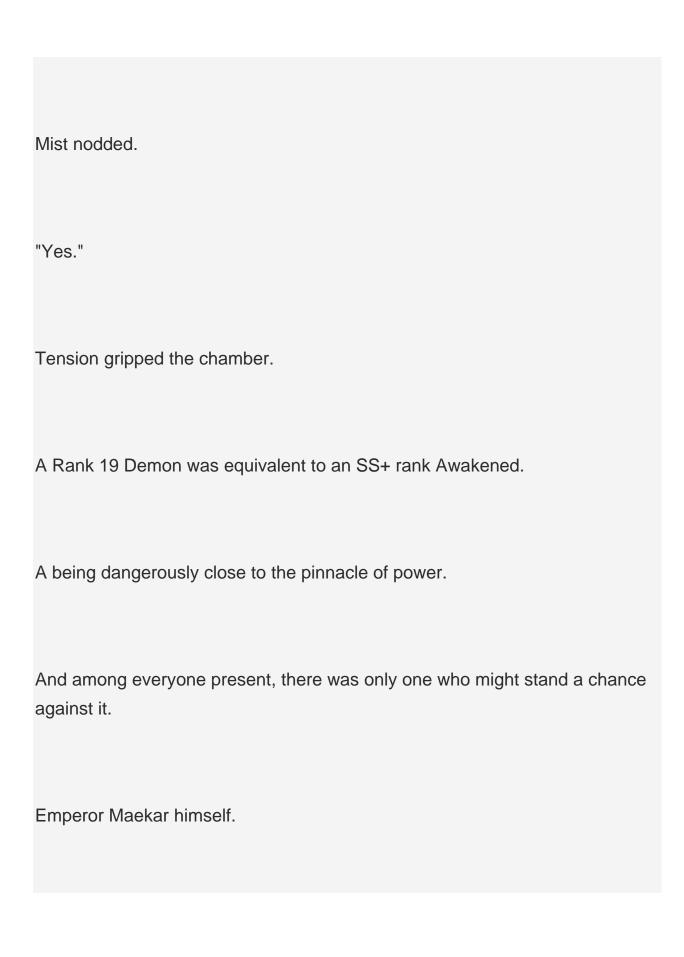
She paused briefly before continuing.
"As I said, this is a war between humans. For three centuries, we have fought, yet never before have the Ultras dared to take such a bold step.
Wouldn't you all agree?"
The room nodded in silent affirmation.
"Then allow me to correct my statement—this is not a war between humans."
Leonidas frowned.
"What are you suggesting?"

Most in the chamber already understood her meaning.
But they refused to accept it.
"The very fact that the Ultras had the audacity to abduct members of the imperial family can mean only one thing
They do not fear retribution."
"In other words, someone is backing them.
Something has given them confidence.
To put it bluntly"
The Emperor's voice cut through the silence.









A heavy silence settled over the room.
Everyone understood.
The world was shifting.
And no one knew where it would lead.
•••
•••
Far from the capital, deep within the Shadow Sect, a lone figure sat in
silence—isolated from the chaos shaking the world.

His long, unkempt hair had grown wild, falling over his face like a curtain.
Clutching a cursed black sword, the boy slowly rose to his feet, whispering words no one could hear.
"It's time to return."
Author's Note:
Rejoice! Another chapter will be out in an hour or two~
Some of you may have noticed—yes, Iris Sunlight was inspired by Iris from God of war.

The characters names are also inspired by various works that I liked, such as A Song of Ice and Fire.