

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.

The first to face his wrath was Baelor Moonlight.

"Baelor Moonlight," the Emperor's voice was like steel, "your house is responsible for defending the western borders. So tell me—how in the hell did they infiltrate all the way to Belgrade under your watch?"

Baelor stiffened under the Emperor's pressure but maintained his composure.

"I offer my deepest apologies, Your Majesty. My family has loyally defended the western borders for generations, and I can assure you—the attack did not come from the west. It originated from within the Empire itself."

The Emperor raised an eyebrow.

"From within?"

"Yes... That much is undeniable. For them to reach the imperial castle itself—such a feat would have been impossible without inside help."

Baelor's words struck a chilling truth.

If there were traitors among them, then the threat was far greater than they had imagined.

A war between black and white was simple. The enemy was clear.

But when shades of gray seeped in, no one knew where the next strike would come from.

"This calls for a full-scale purge."

Iris Sunlight's voice only deepened the tension.

No one knew who the traitor was.

It could be a stranger.

Or it could be someone standing right beside them.

"Send my orders," Maekar commanded. "Summon the Church. Involve the Shadow court—they are closest to the people. Tell them this...

There will be no mercy for traitors."

"As for the Great Houses—I leave the matter in your hands."

"We are grateful for Your Majesty's trust."

The three lords spoke in unison, relieved that the Emperor had not interfered in their internal affairs.

"Forgive my boldness, but may this humble girl share her thoughts?"

All eyes turned to Seris Moonlight.

"You may speak," the Emperor said. "Your presence here is proof of your worth."

Hearing his approval, Ceres bowed slightly before voicing her thoughts.

"The war between us and the Ultras... is a war between humans.

Since the day the great One Sword sealed the rifts, we believed the worst had passed.

But in truth, that was merely the beginning of another war."

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 demon."

The word sent a chill through the chamber.

"Well said, girl. You are absolutely right."

A new voice echoed through the hall.

He had appeared from nowhere.

The chamber was filled with SS-ranked Awakened, individuals who stood at the very pinnacle of power.

And yet, none of them had sensed his presence.

None, save for one—Emperor Maekar.

"So, you've returned... Mist."

Standing before them was a masked man—Mist Umbra, head of the Shadow court and the Empire's deadliest assassin.

"I have." Mist's voice was calm. "I spent the last few months within Ultras territory, and I can confirm what the girl has said."

A heavy silence followed.

What had been speculation just moments ago had now become undeniable truth.

No one could doubt Mist's words.

His name alone carried weight.

The fact that he had infiltrated the Ultras' domain and returned alive was proof enough.

The Emperor met Mist's gaze, his golden eyes unreadable.

"Tell me... its rank?"

Mist was silent for a moment before delivering the words that sent shockwaves through the room.

"An Upper Demon. Rank 19... Astaroth."

Eyes widened in disbelief.

"You're telling me that demons of that level still walk among us?"

Mist nodded.

"Yes."

Tension gripped the chamber.

A Rank 19 Demon was equivalent to an SS+ rank Awakened.

A being dangerously close to the pinnacle of power.

And among everyone present, there was only one who might stand a chance against it.

Emperor Maekar himself.

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.