

VILLAIN 109

Chapter 109 New Power

- Frey Starlight's Pov -

The clock had just struck midnight.

After an intense training session with Carmen, I used the remaining time for solo practice.

Carmen sat nearby, immersed in her meditation. I assumed she was training as well, but I paid her little attention—the searing heat coursing through my muscles demanded all my focus.

My heart pounded violently as my strength surged, little by little.

Finally, after relentless training and consuming the finest Starlight elixirs, I could feel it—a breakthrough approaching.

With every swing of my sword, the aura radiating from my body grew stronger, more potent, until I suddenly froze in place. A dark violet light engulfed me.

"I'm breaking through..."

The moment black, blood-tinged sweat seeped from my pores, I knew—I was undergoing a transformation.

My body was purging impurities, reshaping itself into something stronger. But because I had forced the process rather than letting it occur naturally, the pain was unbearable.

For an entire hour, I endured the torment, my body convulsing, drenched in sweat. Then, at last, the agony subsided. My body finally settled.

I lifted my hands, studying the changes.

My skin had become clearer, and my entire body felt lighter—significantly so. But more importantly, my aura reserves had expanded drastically.

"Finally... Rank C-."

At long last, I had left Rank D behind.

From Rank C onward, training would only grow harsher, and the gaps between ranks would become much more pronounced.

Fortunately, I had already raised my talent to Rank S. Otherwise, reaching Rank C- this quickly would have been impossible.

But now, a new problem loomed—Rank C.

My mission required me to reach it before the month's end. That left me with only twenty days.

Even with my current insane training pace... I wasn't sure if I'd make it in time.

"Should I increase my talent again?"

No... That would cost me 8,000 Achievement Points—an amount I didn't have.

Then what?

As I pondered my next move, a powerful surge of aura erupted nearby.

I turned toward the source—Carmen. She sat with her eyes tightly shut, her body radiating an intense white light.

One look at her, and I immediately understood what was happening.

"She's at a bottleneck..."

Carmen was currently at the peak of Rank S+, just one step away from Rank SS-.

Curious, I took a seat at a distance and observed.

Were high-rank training methods still the same as I had written, or had they changed? I wanted to know.

For hours, I split my focus between my own meditation and stealing glances at Carmen whenever possible.

Then, at last, she opened her eyes—with a scowl.

That look told me everything. She had failed to break through.

Satisfied with my findings, I smiled. At the very least, high-rank training methods remained unchanged.

Carmen looked frustrated, but she quickly noticed my presence. One glance, and her sharp eyes caught on.

"You broke through."

I nodded.

"Yeah... I entered Rank C- a few hours ago."

She seemed skeptical, falling into deep thought.

"Tell me... How long did it take you to go from Rank D+ to C-?"

"I'm not entirely sure, but I think... around a month? Maybe a little less."

My answer only deepened her doubts.

"You advanced that quickly, despite your talent only being Rank A?"

Ever since I returned from the Nightmare Lands, Carmen had sensed something off about me.

And now, I was feeding into her suspicions even more—intentionally.

"Credit goes to your hellish training... and Ada's support."

"No... Even with that kind of training, this speed is still unnatural."

"And what about you, Carmen?"

I steered the conversation away from myself, hoping to stop her from prying further.

"Me?"

"Yeah... You're close to breaking through, aren't you?"

Ordinarily, she should have been pleased. But she wasn't.

If anything, she seemed frustrated.

"You don't understand a damn thing, kid."

"Oh, but I do. I know you need external help to break through."

Carmen scowled.

I had hit the mark.

In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if she had been stuck at the peak of Rank S+ for over a year.

After reaching Rank S, the gaps between tiers became massive—practically different worlds.

Many spent their entire lives training, yet never surpassed Rank S, no matter how hard they tried.

Take Frost Moonlight, for example. A prodigy who tore through the ranks at an astonishing pace—but now that he had reached Rank S-, his progress had slowed to a crawl.

As for Carmen, from what I knew, her talent was SS at best. Meaning she was nearing her limit, which explained her stagnation.

At this stage, Awakened individuals like her needed external assistance—someone with a higher aura level to help them shatter the barrier preventing their breakthrough.

That meant she needed someone at Rank SS or higher.

This was why the Starlight family hadn't produced an Awakened of that level since Abraham. Their strongest members had only ever reached Rank S+.

Of course, there were rare exceptions, like Snow—those capable of surpassing their limits without external aid. But Carmen wasn't one of them.

Seeing that I was well aware of her situation, Carmen sighed in frustration.

"In the past, we had Abraham... If he were still alive, we wouldn't be struggling with something like this."

Carmen always changed when she spoke about him—Abraham Starlight. The father of this body.

She even helped me solely because she owed him a debt, or so she claimed.

But was that really all there was to it?

"Carmen... Abraham—my father. What was he to you?"

Her brow furrowed the moment I asked.

At first, I wasn't sure. But now, I was almost certain. Call it an author's intuition.

With a sly grin, I asked her casually,

"You loved him, didn't you? Am I wrong?"

Carmen's eyes widened in shock.

'Bingo... I was right.'

I had suspected it for a while but dismissed the thought at first due to the age difference between them.

But then I remembered—age gaps worked differently in this world. Applying my past world's standards here had been a mistake.

Suddenly, I felt an oppressive force as Carmen ran her fingers through her hair, clearly irritated.

"Tch... You're really starting to get on my nerves, kid."

With that pressure alone, she locked me in place—I couldn't move.

"Do you think that just because you reached that weak Rank C-, you're qualified to mess with me?"

She flicked my chest with her finger.

"You're still just half a man who doesn't know his place. I can't even use you for my own needs, yet you have the audacity to play games with me?"

Carmen's finger barely tapped my chest, but each touch sent a shockwave of force through me, making my organs tremble.

Yet, I simply laughed at her words.

"I'm not trying to play games with you, Carmen... Ugh... I'm making you an offer."

She paused, withdrawing her hand, giving me space to speak.

"What are you talking about?"

A smirk tugged at my lips the moment she asked.

"I can help you break through to Rank SS—the goal you've been chasing for so long. In fact, I can make you even stronger."

Her expression remained unreadable, but the look in her eyes was clear—she thought I was insane.

She let out an exasperated sigh, shaking her head.

"Focus on your training and survival, kid. Stop spewing nonsense."

She turned away, intending to leave, but I called out to her.

"Strange, isn't it?"

She stopped. "Hmm?"

"My training speed... How I managed to land a hit on you before... How I survived for an entire year in the Nightmare Lands... Tell me, does any of that make sense?"

She hesitated. Even she couldn't fully explain those things.

"If you can accept all that, then why refuse to believe that I can help you reach Rank SS?"

Damn... I never realized how persuasive I could be.

Carmen slowly turned to face me, her gaze searching. I had her attention now.

Extending my hand, I smiled.

"I'll make you far stronger than you ever imagined... So, Carmen, become mine."

"Do you even realize what you're saying, kid?"

Oops... Maybe I went a little too far.

"I know exactly what I'm saying. Form a contract with me. I'll give you power—I'll share my secrets. In return, you'll be my eyes, my hands, and my sword."

Carmen suddenly burst into laughter.

"You want me to serve you? Kid, you're the boldest young man I've ever met. I'll give you that. I can't remember the last time someone dared to speak to me like this."

"Then think of it as a partnership," I countered. "Carmen, you were willing to do anything for my father. Now, I stand before you as his son... Why not give this a chance?"

Perhaps the only reason she hadn't blown my head off yet was the fact that I was Abraham Starlight's child. But I had to take this risk—I needed strength to survive in this den of wolves. And who better than Carmen?

"That's enough. I don't want to hear any more of your nonsense. Your father has been dead for a long time. Don't use his name to bargain with me."

"Then how about this?"

I took a slow step toward her.

"I'll prove that I can make you stronger. If I succeed, will you at least consider my offer seriously?"

Carmen fell silent, lost in thought.

To her, I was just a reckless boy.

But even she knew—appearances could be deceiving.

Especially in my case.

Somehow, I had convinced her to give me a chance.

"If you're messing with me, Frey... don't blame me for what happens next."

I gave her a lopsided smile and immediately set my plan in motion.

"Since you've agreed, let's begin."

She raised a brow.

"Begin what?"

Cracking my knuckles, I stretched.

"Your training, of course."

She looked at me like I was an idiot but followed my instructions nonetheless.

I had her sit in the center of the training field.

Then, I positioned myself behind her.

"Listen, kid, the only way to speed up my training is with the help of someone who has far greater aura than me."

"And that's exactly what I'm about to do."

Now, she was completely lost—especially when I placed both hands on her back.

"I'm going to assist you. Try drawing aura from me. I can't control it properly yet."

Her patience was wearing thin.

"And just how the hell will your pathetic Rank C aura help me?!"

I sighed. This conversation was dragging on longer than necessary.

"Just trust me, Carmen. Do as I say."

She hesitated, then reluctantly closed her eyes.

'Abraham... I swear I'm trying... But your son...'

Gritting her teeth, she allowed her aura to connect with mine.

A scorching pain ignited inside me.

The aura channels within my body flared violently.

From the outside, glowing violet veins pulsed beneath my skin.

The pain was unbearable... But I had no choice but to endure it.

Finally, as Carmen forcibly pulled my aura out—

It was like a shattered dam unleashing a devastating flood.

"See, kid? I told you—there's no benef—HAAAARGH!!!"

Carmen's scream tore through the air.

A monstrous force surged through her body.

Her cries echoed as the overwhelming aura of Rank SSS drowned out her own.

It took only five seconds before her body was drenched in sweat, her breathing ragged.

She gasped for air, her eyes twitching as if they were about to burst from their sockets.

"W-What the hell...?"

With great effort, she turned to face me—only to see a body on the verge of exploding.

Violent purple light surged beneath my skin.

My eyes—empty, glowing with the same ominous radiance.

"Rank SS+...? No... It's far beyond that..."

Carmen struggled to compose herself as her ironclad self-control crumbled.

"This power... It surpasses Emperor Maekar himself!"

She clenched her eyes shut, trying to process what she had just experienced.

That barrier preventing her from reaching Rank SS- ...

The one she couldn't even scratch for years...

The moment she connected with a boy far weaker than her—

It had begun to crack.

But she wasn't the only one training here.

By forcing out the ocean of aura trapped within me, Carmen had put me through excruciating pain.

But in return, it would accelerate my progress.

Right now, I was subjecting my aura channels to a pressure they couldn't withstand. It was only a matter of time before they burned out completely.

But once they healed, they'd return far stronger.

And that was my bet.

I would break this body, let it heal, then repeat the cycle over and over.

Each time, I would grow stronger—until I reached my goal.

It was a reckless gamble... but it was my only way to climb the ranks before time ran out.

Two birds with one stone.

That was my plan.

A trickle of blood dripped from my nose as I approached my limit.

Yet, my grin only widened.

Carmen... You're mine now.