

VILLAIN 153

Chapter 153 Demon and King

Far beyond the crater, shadows stirred.

Emerging from the darkness, Gavardiol let out a breathless chuckle, his lips curling into a grin.

"We really were about to die back there, huh? Haha..."

From within the void, another figure stepped forward—V.

If not for Gavardiol's shadowmelding ability, both of them would have perished.

"So this... is the power of the Hollows. It rivals that of the Lords."

"..."

A storm of emotions brewed within the tyrant's gaze, an undeniable thirst for battle.

Yet, he knew the gap in power was insurmountable.

And V, the weakest among them, remained silent, fingers tightening around the hilt of his Moonlight Blade.

Nearby, Gavid Lindman emerged, his once-elegant coat now tattered.

Despite his disheveled appearance, he was unharmed.

Though his expression twisted into one of barely contained fury.

"Glad to see you all made it."

Mergo also reappeared, completely unscathed, carrying Laurence over his shoulder.

Encased in a slicing field of energy, he had remained untouched by Jacob's Ladder.

On the opposite side of the crater, the Empire's forces regrouped.

Most had escaped the brunt of the attack, with Ramiel already tending to their wounds.

Yet Adam Smasher lay on the ground, his massive frame separated from his armor.

"Hey, you alright?" Callistes asked, glancing over, certain he had already healed him moments ago.

Adam only clenched his fist, slamming it into the dirt, his expression twisted in frustration.

"I'm fine... I just hit my limit earlier. I would've died if not for the Silver Dragon Armor."

Ramiel's gaze shifted to the now-dormant armor, which had shrunk into a mere insignia resembling a dragon's head.

A terrifying artifact—its true potential hindered only by Adam's lack of strength.

Even so, it had tanked a direct hit from an SS-ranked Awakened.

Both sides were on the verge of making their next move.

Then the sky ignited once more.

"What now?"

Most of them cursed as the circular blades covered the entire sky...

Ludwig was about to rain down even more devastating attacks upon them.

At the same time, the Ultras launched another assault.

"This will never end..." Ramiel muttered grimly.

"Take him down, Claymore."

Everyone's eyes widened as Melina's golden sword extended at an astonishing speed, transforming into a massive metallic beam.

The tip of the Claymore pierced Ludwig's chest as he grabbed its edge. Yet, the weapon continued expanding, smashing him through one of the nearby mountains.

"What the—?!"

Melina's sword had now extended beyond a thousand meters, creating a breathtaking sight.

In the blink of an eye, it retracted at the same terrifying speed, while Melina leaped forward.

Meanwhile, the mountain that had buried Ludwig exploded as he shot back toward them at breakneck speed.

"I'll clear a path! Everyone, retreat!"

"Hah?!"

The group was stunned by Melina's declaration.

The battle was reaching a stalemate, and soon, they would all be annihilated.

Melina had decided to fight with everything she had, holding off the enemies to give her team a chance to escape.

That was why she was finally revealing her true power.

"Mergo, isn't she your opponent?!" Lindman shouted as he clashed with Mist Umbra.

"Ah... Is she?" The old man chuckled, clearly toying with them.

But Melina's Claymore extended toward him at a terrifying speed, forcing him to react. He barely managed to block with his Uchigatana.

Without hesitation, Melina retracted her sword and clashed directly with Ludwig up close.

"Are you planning to fight both of us at once?"

Melina was prepared to unleash everything.

But from behind her, Mist Umbra's eyes glowed green beneath his mask.

"We can't afford to lose you here... Bearer of the Claymore."

Mist's body radiated power as Lindman instinctively backed away.

"Forgive me, everyone... Endure it."

Who would have thought that the one to unleash his full power first would be the most rational among them?

"What are you doing?!" Callistes shouted, sensing the incoming danger. But Mist did not stop.

"Supreme Art: Zero Wave."

A wave of unseen power erupted—a devastating sonic attack spreading across a thousand-meter radius.

This time, the attack was too fast for anyone to react. Everyone was caught in it.

A destructive sound wave struck their minds directly, rupturing their ears and causing blood to flow.

Now, everyone was disoriented—including Ludwig—his aura, which had been disrupting Luc Valerion, suddenly weakened.

Luc tried to steady himself, seizing this brief window to teleport them all, despite also being hit by Mist's attack.

The assassin had targeted all the Ultras before they could recover.

This was their last chance...

Their closest opportunity...

Mergo was about to take things seriously when he saw their desperate attempt. But he didn't need to.

Because, in the very next second, everything changed.

The air itself shifted.

As if the sky had grown darker...

The expressions of the imperial side began to sink as an overwhelming pressure bore down upon them.

A sinister presence... a terrifying entity...

Everyone froze in place, paralyzed by an indescribable fear.

Above them, floating with the moon at his back...

"Such a desperate struggle..."

His voice was venomous and grating.

The group, their ears shattered, could not hear him. But they saw him.

A strange figure, with dead, grayish skin and eyes with pitch-black pupils.

A pair of fearsome horns adorned his head, while long, thick white hair cascaded down, tinged with gray.

His arms were elongated, ending in black, razor-sharp claws.

He wore only a black robe, and from his back, a pair of dark wings stretched wide.

Perhaps this was the first time they had ever seen one...

"An Upper Demon..."

The Ultras side hastily retreated as Mergo sheathed his sword.

It was over.

The demon had descended to end it himself.

Rank 19... Astaroth.

The Empire's forces gathered together, with Mist standing at the front.

The current situation was entirely unpredictable.

Astaroth gazed at them before unleashing the full pressure of his SS+ peak-tier power.

A force that pressed them deep into the ground.

"So these are the insects you've failed to kill thus far?"

Astaroth spoke in a dreary voice, reprimanding Mergo and his comrades.

His pressure struck them as well, and it could be said that Mergo was the only one who withstood it decently.

Yet, he said nothing... merely smiled in silence.

"What did you expect when you sent insects to deal with insects..."

Astaroth pointed his finger at Mist and his group.

"How unfortunate... Perhaps you could have been good specimens for the path to Sovereignty. But now, you're nothing more than insects on a chopping board."

"Stronger and more vibrant than the other pathetic ones... yet still, nothing more than inferior existences."

"Die."

From the tip of Astaroth's finger, a bizarre dark attack was unleashed, like black ink staining the very void itself.

A black pillar descended upon them, far more powerful than Ludwig's previous strike.

Everyone was still too shocked at the sight of a demon, too overwhelmed by a pressure they were unaccustomed to, delaying their reaction—except for one person.

Mist Umbra stepped forward, unleashing his full power against the devastating strike.

"Storm Shield!"

A dense wind barrier formed around everyone as Mist poured everything he had into it.

Astaroth's power violently clashed against the shield, engulfing the ground in darkness.

Mist strained to hold back the attack, blood seeping from the gaps in his mask.

Astaroth's strike continued to pound against the barrier, moments away from shattering it completely.

"Run!"

Mist shouted.

Luc Valerion moved immediately to save whoever he could—but Astaroth had already seen it all.

"A futile effort..."

He was about to stop the young mage and end them all.

But the surprises were far from over, as the demon himself shuddered.

The sky above him split open.

A spear... a lightning bolt...

What was it exactly?

It didn't matter.

What mattered was that the colossal lightning spear obliterated the area, illuminating the bleak sky once more.

It was unimaginably fast—even Astaroth noticed it too late.

Thunderous vibrations spread as lightning coursed through everything.

At that moment, they heard the voice clearly.

"Why don't you face someone your own size?"

...

...

...

A few minutes earlier, at the moment Astaroth appeared—far away from the Ultras continent, across the Demon Ocean, within the Empire...

A lone man stood atop his massive castle, ruling over everything from within.

He was overwhelming... his sheer presence alone was oppressive.

Electric sparks erupted continuously around him.

His golden eyes gleamed with power as his blonde hair surged upward.

Oliver Khan stood nearby, watching what the Emperor, Maekar Valerion, was about to do.

Lightning condensed as the pressure intensified.

Maekar's words echoed slowly.

"A spear mightier than mountain peaks."

In mere moments, Maekar formed a spear that dwarfed the entire palace and rivaled the mountains themselves.

The amount of compressed lightning aura within it was beyond comprehension.

At that moment, grasping the spear with one hand...

The strongest spear-wielder in this world unleashed a devastating attack.

His hand was like a rocket launcher, hurling the spear at an unimaginable speed that shook the earth and split the sky in two.

It was a continent-crossing spear... eradicating everything in its path before crashing down upon Astaroth's head, Who was far away from the Emperor's location...

With a single strike, Maekar erased the distance between two continents and struck Astaroth ..

BZZZT

BZZZT

Seizing the opportunity created by Maekar's terrifying strike, Luc Valerion coordinated with the Imperial Palace's mages and teleported everyone away—putting an end to their nightmare.

At the same time, Maekar's voice echoed in everyone's ears, despite the vast distance between them.

"Why don't you face someone your own size?"

"Haha... Ha..."

In response, the demon's laughter echoed from within the thunderclouds, unscathed.

"What words... This is the descendant of that wretched one who once clashed with the high ranks, isn't it? Valerion?"

Likewise, Astaroth's words reached Maekar...

In that moment, a strange conversation unfolded between a human and a demon—both standing continents apart.

Yet they gazed at each other clearly.

Reaching one another was nothing but a trivial matter for them.

"Go back to where you came from, vile being... This land is not for your kind to tread upon."

Astaroth's laughter grew wilder at the human's defiance.

"A pathetic insect... with but a single life... More powerful and vibrant than the rest, yes... But still, a mere insignificant existence."

Astaroth continued laughing, having finally found a human worthy of facing him.

"Let the days count down... for your death shall be the final act of this miserable play... Valerion."

"..."

That confirmed it.

War was inevitable.