

VILLAIN 154

Chapter 154 Beyond the Veil (1)

After the brief clash between the strongest forces of the Ultras Continent and the Empire, the monumental event finally came to an end as both Maekar and Astaroth exchanged a few words.

With that, war became inevitable. Both sides were now slowly mobilizing their forces—whether it was the Empire or the Ultras, they were both entangled in the intricate calculations of large-scale warfare.

But one thing was certain—whoever struck first would officially ignite the war.

The only question was... who would make the first move?

Time alone would provide the answer.

Both Maekar and Astaroth had already withdrawn their auras. The demon was about to leave... until he suddenly stopped, his gaze locking onto the lunatic soaring toward him.

Mergo and the other Ultras watched the scene unfold, their mouths agape.

"Well, would you look at that?"

Ludwig the Cursed was every bit as insane as the rumors suggested—unshackled by contracts, untethered to the demons.

He actually dared to point his weapon at Astaroth.

"Oh, how adorable."

-Slash!-

Ludwig swung his scythe at Astaroth's head, but the latter caught the terrifying weapon with a single hand.

Without hesitation, Ludwig poured all his strength into his assault, unleashing hundreds of devastating strikes that shook the very fabric of space itself.

Yet, Astaroth blocked them all with one hand.

"Pathetic mutt... I despise rabid dogs like you."

Astaroth scoffed, raising his palm toward Ludwig's face.

"Perish."

A jet-black beam shot forth, crushing Ludwig and driving him into the ground.

The latter barely managed to withstand the attack, his scythe acting as his only defense.

Astaroth observed him for a moment before the darkness in his arms began to surge violently.

"Blut Release."

Suddenly, the darkness twisted into something entirely different as black lightning crackled through Astaroth's arms.

"This is..."

The spectators' eyes widened at the sight.

Black lightning.

Without mercy, Astaroth unleashed a relentless barrage upon Ludwig, who barely had time to comprehend what was happening.

"You must've gotten ahead of yourself just because you're a mere Hollow."

The black lightning rained down mercilessly, again and again.

Ludwig didn't block a single strike.

The power gap between the upper ranks was truly insurmountable.

Death was imminent.

Sensing the approaching end...

Ludwig let out a sound for the first time.

A howl.

It was deep, guttural—like a wounded beast in agony.

His cry was so loud that everyone was momentarily taken aback.

"What is he doing?"

They all assumed it was the wailing of a dying tyrant.

But it wasn't.

"Hm?"

Astaroth furrowed his brows, sensing something resisting him.

"What's going on?"

It should've been impossible for Ludwig to resist someone at the peak of SS+ rank.

But within seconds, Astaroth realized something.

The one who had stopped him...

Wasn't Ludwig.

"What in the abyss is this?"

Above Ludwig...

A figure emerged.

A specter... A monster?

What exactly was it?

The sight left everyone horrified—it was more grotesque than even Astaroth himself.

A ghostly entity with a nightmarish, horse-like maw. Its grotesquely elongated arms stretched down to the ground as it enveloped Ludwig in an eerie embrace.

And then, the creature roared.

Its scream sent a shockwave barreling toward Astaroth.

The demon raised his arm to block the attack.

Behind him, dozens of mountains crumbled instantly, while the clouds in the distance dispersed.

Astaroth glanced over his shoulder in shock before looking down at his arm—it was partially numb.

Then, a slow, sinister grin spread across his face.

"You've really done it now !!"

Among all those present, only Mergo and Gavid Lindman recognized that entity.

"This..."

Mergo nodded.

"The Cosmos... One of the Three Lords of the Nightmare."

A monster that ruled the southern Nightmare Lands—a being of SS+ rank.

A terrifying existence. A filthy abomination that no one dared to approach.

And apparently... it was the entity Ludwig had made a contract with—the source of his strange aura.

Astaroth conjured a massive wave of black lightning, aiming to obliterate the abomination. But the Cosmos withdrew into itself, shielding both Ludwig and itself as its body flared with an intense glow.

At that moment, the Cosmos let out a thunderous roar as Astaroth's strike crashed down upon it.

Yet, within mere moments, it vanished—Ludwig along with it—as if neither had ever existed, leaving everyone bewildered.

Among them, only Astaroth and Mergo managed to trace the aura's path as the Cosmos fled.

Astaroth scowled, tightening his grip.

"It seems the number of bothersome pests is growing lately..."

Perhaps this land held more than he had initially accounted for.

With a sinister smile, the demon folded into himself and disappeared.

"Maybe I didn't come here in vain after all..."

Perhaps this was his chance...

To seize even greater power. To ascend beyond his current rank.

"Oh, my lord Agaroth... Witness my fate and guide me on the path..."

"To bury all these wretched creatures."

Astaroth vanished, and so did the rest of his followers.

At last, the curtain fell on this brutal battle.

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The pieces clashed against one another.

There were too many of them.

Maekar, and his son Aegon, watching from afar with a faint smile.

The Church and the Lord of Light.

The Ultras and the demons.

The noble families, and Frey, lost within the temple's depths.

Too many pieces scattered across this vast chessboard.

Who would remain standing in the end?

They all lived by their overwhelming power and their own ambitions.

Yet, from the very beginning, they were nothing but pieces—moved by unseen hands across the board.

Reflected within his glassy blue eyes.

Deep within the Ultras' domain...

Neither the Empire's elite nor the Ultras themselves...

Not even Astaroth...

None of them noticed him.

A strange figure, clad in black from head to toe.

The only thing visible was his glassy blue eyes and his complete absence of presence.

A mere specter, drifting from one place to another.

And now, he had arrived at the heart of Old Yharnam, a city completely wiped from existence.

The chronicler of history walked forward slowly, observing the aftermath of the terrifying battle.

He verified everything. Ensured every piece was in place.

The board was set.

Now, he had to continue his work.

He had to cast more...

More sparks to bring forth the final picture.

The man with the blue eyes stood still for a while, his gaze flickering with chaotic movement before suddenly coming to a halt.

A deep voice escaped his lips.

"So... you've come."

Behind him, another figure was already standing—dressed in black as well.

The latter slowly lifted his head, revealing his face as he pulled back his hood.

An old man. Ancient, his face marred with deep scratches and horrifying scars across his eyes.

He was blind.

And if one looked closely, they would recognize him—he was none other than the old man who had visited Bloodmader not long ago.

The old man scowled deeply as he took slow steps toward the blue-eyed figure.

"You have no idea... how long I've been searching for you."

The atmosphere began to shift.

"For so many years... ever since you showed me that damned future... those deceitful visions..."

The old man seethed with rage.

"Here and now, you will reveal everything, you wretched fraud."