

VILLAIN 195

Chapter 195 Quarterfinal Draw

—One week until the finals—

With less than seven days remaining before the start of the quarterfinals...

Frey Starlight was still unconscious, trapped inside a body no longer capable of proper combat.

The moment they returned to the Temple, the Starlight family immediately took him into custody.

After successfully seizing control of the Starlight household with Carmen's help, Ada thought things would finally settle down.

Even though Leonidas Starlight had disappeared under mysterious circumstances...

the family now bowed to her authority.

But once again, she was hit with devastating news—

her brother had fallen into another coma.

For three days and nights, Ada poured every resource and healer the Starlight family had into helping him.

Standing outside the treatment room alongside Carmen, the two women watched the young man lying inside—

his body hooked up to dozens of wires and tubes.

Still unconscious.

"This is strange..." Ada muttered quietly.

Carmen's sharp hearing picked up her voice.

"What's strange?"

Ada's thoughts drifted to the not-so-distant past.

"Last time, Frey was in a coma for over a month... making us think he might never wake up."

The aftermath of the curse back then had taken him far, for far too long.

"And as soon as he woke up... it was only a few days before he returned to the Temple.

Now he's fallen into another..."

She clenched her fists.

This time... it might be permanent.

What if next time, he returned to her as a corpse—without anyone knowing how or why he died?

"They said it was an attack by Nightmare creatures..."

That was the Temple's official story.

"But what kind of Nightmare creature could cause injuries like these?"

It made no sense.

Faced with such a situation, Ada couldn't help but wonder—

What was the right move now?

As dark thoughts clouded her mind...

Carmen's hand settled on her shoulder.

"Ada... don't do anything reckless. The family has just barely stabilized after everything."

It was far too early to make any major move, not when their foundation was still this fragile.

"But..."

"There's no need to worry. Your brother... he's a lot like him.

That's why I'm certain—he'll wake up any moment now."

Frey Starlight had already shown them miracles—

miracles that defied reason and broke through the impossible.

In that way, he was very much like his father ... Abraham Starlight.

It was hard to imagine that young man losing to something like this.

In that sense, Carmen Starlight believed in him.

She wouldn't have accepted him as her master otherwise.

Elsewhere, Ada continued staring at her brother's face...

Seeing how fragile he looked.

She fiddled with a strange device in her hands, recalling a conversation she'd once had with a certain man.

The future he'd shown her...

they'd already managed to escape it.

But she still didn't know what this thing in her hands was for.

She remembered only the words that man with glowing blue eyes had said:

"When everything seems over...

when the devil's claws reach the one most precious to you...

that's when the time will come."

But when was "the time," exactly?

She didn't know. Not yet.

Three days passed.

Ada's only comfort during that time was the steady report that Frey's body had started to respond to treatment.

With the help of top-level healers—and even one of the most talented saintess candidates volunteering personally—

Uriel Platini, the third-place finisher in the senior division of the Island Trial,

had come herself to assist.

Thanks to that, Frey's body had fully recovered—except for his aura pathways.

Uriel let out a sigh the moment she met Ada.

"To be honest with you... his body is a mystery. One I haven't been able to solve."

After spending hours trying to treat the junior who had caught her attention long ago, Uriel found herself stunned by the strange makeup of his body.

"His body heals much faster than a normal human's, without leaving any scars. You could say my holy power merely sped up the process."

She had heard he spent an entire year trapped in the Eastern Nightmare Lands, but even that didn't explain the bizarre structure of his body.

On the other hand—

"His aura pathways are completely damaged... and yet, not quite."

She didn't know how to explain it properly.

Yes, his pathways were still broken...

But compared to the first day she saw him, they seemed—as if—healing on their own.

Bit by bit...

His body was restoring itself.

She wasn't sure how true that was.

But if it turned out to be real...

It would stir the world.

After all, she'd never once heard of anyone recovering from destroyed aura pathways.

It was supposed to be impossible.

All she could say now was—

"I'll do everything I can."

Uriel Platini decided to stay involved, having found something she had never seen before.

That night...

Inside the empty operating room...

Frey thrashed violently.

His bare body was drenched in sweat, glowing with streaks of light beneath his pale skin.

His face twisted in agony, as if wildfire ran through his veins...

Even while unconscious, he continued to suffer.

His veins pulsed violently.

That violet light kept surging through him, igniting muscles that struggled to hold on.

His aura pathways were in complete disarray.

At that hour, Frey was alone. It was late at night.

His designated guard stood nearby—but something was wrong. The man seemed dazed, as if bewitched. His eyes were completely lifeless, despite being someone of S-rank.

Ada had gone too far—she'd assigned someone like that to guard her brother.

For a moment... Frey suffered alone.

And in the next second ..

The number of people in the room went from one... to two.

Before the suffering Frey, a grey hand—doll-like in appearance—rested gently against his chest.

Blue eyes glowing like twin lamps stared down at him.

From that hand, a flame of strange blue aura flowed into Frey's chest.

The pain was unbearable...

But Frey's breathing gradually steadied.

His purple aura pathways turned blue, their intensity softening... until they finally settled.

Silently, the stranger withdrew his hand.

The figure—the Engineer—gazed down at Frey before shifting his attention to the snake tattoo on Frey's hand.

"..."

In silence, he traced his finger across the serpent's form—

From the tip of the tail to its fanged head.

The snake reacted to him, slithering along his skin the entire way.

Then, without warning...

The Engineer pulled Balerion from Frey's hand, leaving it exposed. The prideful blade submitted entirely to him.

He raised the blade, staring at its abyssal black surface—lost in what seemed like old memories.

He had only one hand now.

But one hand was enough.

Slowly, aura poured into the blade.

"When the time comes... do your part, old friend."

Gently, the Engineer returned the sword to Frey's hand.

The serpent slithered back to its den—as if it had never moved.

And as for the Engineer...

He had already vanished... while the guard finally returned to his senses.

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-Day Four-

That day, the draw was finally announced.

The quarterfinal matchups for the Victoriad.

Everyone watched the reveal with bated breath, excitement thick in the air.

As always, the senior divisions garnered the lion's share of attention...

But this time...

The first-year bracket had a crowd of its own—one that rivaled, and at times even surpassed, the seniors in sheer enthusiasm.

And it showed clearly in the overwhelming response to the draw.

Quarterfinal - First-Year Division

Match 1:

Snow Lionheart vs Dawn Polaris

Match 2:

Ghost Umbra vs Ragna Cloud

Match 3:

Daemon Valerion vs Danzo Smasher

Match 4 (Final Match):

Frey Starlight vs Seris Moonlight

The tournament bracket was starting to take shape.

The winner of the first match would face the victor of the second.

And the third match's winner would go head-to-head with the fourth's.

Just like that... the path toward the Victoriad title had been drawn.

The Empire now stood at the peak of its glory—shaken repeatedly by one revelation after another.

But none more shocking than this...

An announcement from the Church that left the world in awe—

The Prophesied Hero... had finally appeared.

The first true hero since the days of Kazis Valerion, the founding emperor.

Yes...

The great sword, Vermithor, had chosen its wielder at last.

And all of this... happened while Frey Starlight remained unconscious.