

## VILLAIN 196

### Chapter 196 The Chosen Hero

The Empire hadn't known peace in days.

"A new Hero..."

"The sacred sword once wielded by Emperor Kazis Valerion has chosen a new master..."

The first true Hero since Kazis himself had finally emerged.

And his name was Snow Lionheart.

A nobody by all accounts. Not a descendant of Valerion blood, not from one of the Great Houses—just a boy with no known origins. An orphan who had lost his way the day he was born.

But the appearance of a new Hero meant more than just a name. It marked a shift that would echo throughout the Empire.

To the devout zealots of the Church, it was euphoria. The Hero was considered the messenger of the Lord of light they so blindly worshipped. And now, Snow Lionheart stood above even the high priests.

What the Lord of light declared was absolute. And if He had chosen Snow, then the most powerful force in the Empire would now kneel before a boy not yet eighteen.

To the faithful, it was a miracle.

But to the Great Houses and the major guilds, it was a warning.

Yes, the birth of a Hero was a divine event.

But in history, a Hero was only ever born in times of desperate need—during eras of war that tore the world apart.

If a new Hero had truly risen... then something worse than ever before was looming on the horizon.

And just as the Empire prepared for an all-out war against the Ultras, many still underestimated the scale of what was coming—a conflict that could dwarf even the War of Light itself.

While some looked to the future with hope and others with dread...

A young man sat quietly in a grand chamber, staring into a mirror.

White hair. Golden eyes.

Snow Lionheart couldn't even recognize his own reflection.

Clad in an elegant white jacket embroidered with gold, black polished trousers, and a dark sash flowing behind his back—he looked more like a royal than the orphan he truly was.

Immediately after returning from the Island Test, the Church summoned him. Not through a letter or a priest. No—two of the highest Archbishops came to escort him personally:

Michael Platini and Ramiel Callistes.

Even now, the words they spoke barely registered in Snow's mind.

The lord of light had chosen him...

him... to be His Hero?

Snow didn't understand any of it. He knew nothing of faith, or gods, or destiny.

And yet, his thoughts kept returning to one thing—the sword he'd glimpsed from afar.

The strongest sword in existence: Vermithor.

He was told it had already acknowledged him as its master.

A sword of SS rank.

Even though he hadn't touched it yet, Snow felt something resonate deep within him. A bond, strange and ancient, like the sword had always been waiting for him.

He had long chased strength... and now, it had come to him.

A weapon that would erase all weakness.

And yet... he hesitated.

Lost in a storm of thoughts, his door creaked open. An immense pressure washed over him.

The woman who entered had crimson eyes and platinum hair barely concealed beneath a pure white veil.

Radiant. Blinding, even.

"It's time, Chosen Hero," she said.

She was the Saintess—Yurasha.

Snow turned to her, unnerved by how someone so powerful would address him with such respect.

"Please... don't call me that."

She said nothing.

She simply stood behind him in silence.

When he stepped out of the room, she followed him without a word.

Snow stopped.

"Excuse me, but... why are you walking behind me?"

This kind of treatment was excessive.

"The Saintess's role is to follow the Hero," she replied.

It had always been this way. Even the First Hero was always accompanied by a Saintess. They were the only ones who could hear the voice of the lord of light and deliver His will.

"Just call me Snow," he said. "I don't understand your faith. I don't believe in your god."

He studied her expression, expecting offense.

But her face remained still. Serene.

"Then tell me," she said. "Why did you accept the lord of light sword—Vermithor?"

Snow hesitated for a moment... before finally answering.

"Because I want to become stronger."

"For what reason?"

Why had Snow fought all this time?

When he thought about it—what did he actually have?

The answer... was nothing.

He had already lost everything.

His entire world was nothing more than an orphanage—just a worn-down shelter where he was raised among others like him. Children. Lost, innocent children who knew nothing... and who died, one after another.

Back then, how could he have known the orphanage was never really an orphanage at all?

It was something else entirely.

He had lost it all—but in return, gained an overwhelming hatred. One so intense it burned through his very body and became the fuel that kept him moving.

"Revenge... and so no one else ever suffers the same fate I did."

The words left his mouth like a curse, spat from somewhere deep within.

The Saintess looked at him for a brief second.

She could never guess the kind of past that had shaped this boy.

But she didn't flinch. She didn't look away.

"I see. If that's your true desire... then that's enough."

"...What?"

Would she really accept him—after he had just rejected the very god she devoted her life to?

Snow Lionheart was beginning to realize just how strange this Saintess really was.

She was difficult to read. But her strength was undeniable.

She was one of only two living beings to have reached SS+ rank, alongside Emperor Maekar himself.

Snow chose not to press her further.

As they continued on, they arrived at a massive location—one of the Empire's most sacred places.

A grand cathedral, second only in size to the Holy Sanctum on the Isle of Sicily.

Here... more than 300 years ago... the very first Hero, Kazis Valerion, had been crowned.

"Notre-Dame Cathedral..."

The event was being broadcast live across the entire Empire.

Snow looked out upon the crowd before him.

Hundreds—no, thousands—of white-clad pilgrims had gathered from every corner of the land.

He walked between them, the Saintess following quietly behind.

Ahead of him stood the Three High Priests, along with the eleven Saintess Candidates—each chosen and trained for divine purpose.

Leading them was Uriel Platini, the Church's brightest prospect and Yurasha's heir apparent.

As the ceremony began, the candidates unleashed their sacred powers, singing in unison.

Snow felt it—a wave of holy energy pouring into him, filling every inch of his body.

It was overwhelming.

His bones ached from the intensity, his skin buzzed with divine power. He felt as though he might explode at any moment.

But his golden eyes never wavered.

They were locked on one thing.

The sacred sword before him.

Vermithor.

The world held its breath.

Step by step, Snow approached the pedestal until he stood before it.

Silence.

He reached out slowly... and grasped the hilt.

Then—without warning—the blade ignited in light.

A brilliant wave of radiance surged outward, blinding everyone in attendance.

Snow froze in place, paralyzed, as he stood within a pillar of blinding energy.

His golden eyes turned pure white.

His body trembled as a rush of strength flooded his veins—so powerful it instantly pushed him beyond his current rank.

That aura... it made him stronger.

Stronger than he had ever imagined.

With this sword... he felt as if he could do anything.

The sensation was almost intoxicating.

And in that moment... he saw something.

A presence, watching him from afar.

He couldn't see its face—his senses couldn't comprehend whatever that being was...

But he felt its gaze.

Felt its eyes scanning every part of him.

Surrounded by light, Snow stood tall.

Inside the cathedral, one by one, every pilgrim fell to their knees.

All of them bowed before the Chosen Hero.

And thus, another piece fell into place—on that vast, shadowed chessboard far above.