

VILLAIN 21

Chapter 21 Hatching of the Goat's Egg (1)

Shadow Sect – Eastern Nightmare Lands

-Frey starlight POV -

...

"It's time to return."

I rose from where I sat, stepping into the vast arena.

The moment I reached its center, I stopped, running a hand through my now-long hair.

"But... where exactly am I supposed to return to?"

Hmmm...

I started pacing in circles, only to stop again.

"Help me out here, Balerion... where should we go?"

Speaking to the sword bound to my hand, I stood there like a madman, talking to myself.

"Still as shy as ever, huh? Refusing to answer me, as usual."

Hmmmm ♪ Hmm hmm hmm ♪ Hmmm ♪

I hummed, trying to recall a tune I used to love, struggling not to lose the melody.

"Stay quiet, Balerion. I'm trying to focus here."

I stepped right, then left.

"Shall we dance? Yes, let's!"

With sudden enthusiasm, I moved wildly, my body swaying as I tapped my feet against the cold ground.

"Dance with me, Balerion! Let's dance!"

I cradled my sword gently as if it were a beautiful woman, twirling and spinning with it.

"Haha, yes! Just like that... That's why I love you, Balerion."

Each swing of my sword unleashed waves of dark energy.

Had anyone been watching, they would have been left speechless.

After all, my movements were swift—too swift.

One second, I was here; the next, I was over there. Dark aura surged around me as I danced, my form weaving in and out like a living shadow celebrating its existence.

At last, I stopped at the center, leaving fresh scars on the ground.

"That was amazing! Well done, Balerion."

I patted my beloved sword, savoring its cold touch.

Just then, a figure emerged at the other end of the arena—a towering statue wielding a massive sword.

Clad in pitch-black armor, its face was hidden behind a grinning mask.

It stood motionless, staring at me.

A grin spread across my own face in response.

"Smaaaailey! You're here!"

I approached him in an exaggerated, playful manner.

"Is it time already, Smiley?"

I called him that because of the permanent smile on his mask.

My steps quickened, leaving only afterimages behind.

In the blink of an eye, I materialized before Smiley like a phantom, swinging Balerion with relentless force.

He intercepted the strike with his colossal sword, sending shockwaves rippling through the arena

But I didn't stop.

Still airborne, descending slowly, I struck once, twice—dozens of times. Each slash carved arcs of black energy into the air, carrying an overwhelming force.

Each time our swords met, violent gusts erupted around us.

When my feet finally touched the ground, Smiley and I were caught in a whirlwind of clashing steel.

I attacked, and he parried—his speed matching mine with terrifying precision.

Smiley countered, but my enhanced Falcon Eye saw everything.

Black clashed against black, darkness against darkness.

Then, in a single instant, the battle was over.

Smiley's final strike sent me hurtling across the arena.

Hundreds of exchanges—within just one minute.

"Ugh... That hurt."

I pushed myself up, brushing the dust off.

"You're still absurdly strong, Smiley."

But Smiley didn't answer.

Instead, he stepped back as another figure emerged.

"Ooooh, you want a turn too, Sad?"

Another armored statue—similar to Smiley, but his mask bore a sorrowful expression.

That's why I called him Sad.

He approached, wielding a massive spear.

"Hold on a second, let me match your expression."

I exaggerated a sorrowful face, twisting my features in mock despair.

Had anyone been watching, they would have laughed at how ridiculous I looked.

At last, wearing a perfectly melancholic expression, I stood before Sad.

"Shall we begin? I feel like crying."

Sad lunged forward, thrusting his colossal spear.

It was a single attack—yet, for some reason, I saw dozens of spears descending toward me.

"Phantom Steps."

Using my improved Phantom Steps, I moved like a specter, weaving between the strikes.

Balerion became enshrouded in dark energy, forming a blazing black aura.

With a single swing, I unleashed a wave of darkness toward Sad.

But he spun his spear like a fan, dispersing my attack effortlessly.

Anticipating this, I appeared behind him, striking with a barrage of rapid blows.

Like falling meteors, my slashes rained down on him.

In a split second, Sad thrust his spear backward with inhuman speed, deflecting every single attack.

I laughed.

"Do you have eyes in the back of your head or something?"

Shrouding myself in darkness, I launched forward.

"Ten Thousand Steps of Shadow: Black Meteor!"

Sad lifted his head to see a streak of black light plummeting toward him.

With a powerful stomp, he cracked the earth beneath him.

I heard the shriek of metal as his spear shot toward me at an impossible speed.

Our weapons clashed, sending tremors through the arena.

But within moments, his overwhelming strength broke through, sending me flying into a distant wall.

And just like that, Sad left the arena.

I groaned as I got back up.

"What? Already? But the fun was just getting started~"

"Hey! Smiley! Sad! Come back!"

Despite my calls, the statues ignored me, vanishing into the shadows.

"Tch, and here I thought we were getting closer."

With a sigh, I left the arena as well.

I wandered the vast sect, sometimes humming, sometimes singing... sometimes walking in silence.

Eventually, I arrived at the building I had claimed as my home.

Inside, it was empty.

Just a tattered cloth in the corner that served as my bed, and a single laptop resting atop a massive rock I used as a desk.

I booted up the laptop, now containing a third folder—titled My Memoirs.

Sitting down, I began reading through my past entries.

Day One

Tonight is my first night in the sect. I've found both the Ten Thousand Steps of Shadow and Balerion, the Black dread, but mastering them will take time.

Day Two

I've earned a ton of achievement points—can you believe it?

Apparently, quests were being issued constantly as I wandered through the Nightmare Lands.

I completed most of them without even realizing it, earning myself a small fortune. Pretty great, huh?

Day Ten

I've memorized most of Ten Thousand Steps of Shadow and have begun practicing it.

It's even harder than I thought...

Day Fifteen

Father, Mother... I still think of you every second.

You are the fire that keeps me going.

If you ever read this one day, just know—I love you both.

Day 20

I spent some of my hard-earned Achievement Points from missions to upgrade my skills to Rank A.

Now, Hawk's Eye grants me perfect night vision and even slows down time slightly when I'm under attack.

Meanwhile, Ghost Steps has turned me into a literal phantom—my speed more than doubles, making me vanish the moment I move.

I'm getting stronger... but it cost me 2,000 damn points.

Day 40

The deeper I immerse myself in Ten Thousand Steps of Shadow, the more strange visions plague me.

Something new has also appeared in my status:

Shadow Adaptation: 0/7

What the hell is this?

Day 60

The statues have returned.

They come once a day, beat me senseless, then leave.

What the hell do they want?

Day 80

I've barely been able to keep track of time... If it weren't for Ada's supplies, I might've starved to death by now.

I tried leaving, but the statues blocked my way.

I guess I'm not ready yet.

I finally uncovered the secret behind SSS-Rank Aura, and it was no joke.

Day 100

Balerion and I have become the best of friends.

He's always by my side, clinging to me.

Isn't that wonderful?

Day 120

Sometimes, I wonder...

Which son of a bitch threw me into this world?

I swear, I want to shove Balerion up his ass.

Day 140

Empty.

Empty.

Empty.

Day 300

I've fully mastered Ten Thousand Steps of Shadow, but I still can't unleash its full potential—because I'm still too weak.

Day 365

"Oh... so it's been a year, huh?"

I pressed a finger to my temple, tapping my skull lightly.

The wild gleam in my eyes gradually faded into something calmer.

"And just like that... I'm back."

At some point, I realized that if I kept living like this, I'd lose my mind.

So before that could happen... I made myself crazy on purpose.

It was the only way to survive. And it worked.

I created a mental switch in my head—one that lets me revert to my normal self whenever I "press" it.

Though, considering all of this is happening in my mind, I have to question my sanity.

Maybe I've already lost it.

I glanced at the Status Window on my laptop.