

VILLAIN 22

Chapter 22 Hatching of the Goat's Egg (2)

Host: Frey Starlight (dual soul)

Class: Swordsman

Talent: A

Current Rank: D-

Strength: E+

Speed: D

Agility: D-

Endurance: E

Aura: SSS

Magic: G-

Swordsmanship Lv.2 (Limit Broken: The user can now reach Level 7.)

Talents: {Swordsmanship}, {Aura Manipulation}

Combat Style: Ten Thousand Steps of Shadow

Skills:

(Hawk's Eye) – Rank A

Grants night vision, zoom-in/zoom-out vision, and long-distance sight.

Bonus Effect: Slight time dilation when under attack.

Can see through lower-rank stealth techniques.

(Phantom Steps) – Rank A

Doubles movement speed and silences footsteps.

Bonus Effect: The user momentarily vanishes when moving at extreme speeds.

(Seduction) – Rank F

Induces attraction in the target, with a stronger effect on the opposite sex.

The effect weakens if the target is stronger than the user and may not work at all if their rank is two tiers higher.

Abilities:

Shadow Adaptation: 0/7

System Note: What? You want me to praise you? You're still as weak as a larva, so don't get ahead of yourself.~

Current Achievement Points: 6,000

"Not bad, right?"

I climbed all the way from F-Rank to D-.

"I should thank Ada later for the training potions."

I stared at Shadow Adaptation. At first, I didn't understand what it meant.

But after countless battles against Smiley and Sad, and enduring blow after brutal blow, I started to get it.

Every time I learned my opponent's fighting style, a strange black mist would rise around me.

A moment of enlightenment would strike, and suddenly, I'd instinctively counter their moves.

It was just my theory, but if I truly mastered Shadow Adaptation...

I might become the ultimate counter to every combat style.

Just the thought sent shivers down my spine.

I still don't know where this power came from or what exactly happened that day.

After all, I never wrote anything about it.

But I welcomed the extra strength.

My gaze dropped to the bottom of the screen.

I smirked at the sight of my Achievement Points.

Even after spending 4,000 points to upgrade my skills and another 1,500 to unlock talents, I still had plenty left.

The reason was simple.

I checked my Missions tab.

Main Mission:

Successfully acquire Ten Thousand Steps of Shadow: +2,000 AP (Completed)

Side Missions:

Survive the Shroud of the Dead: +300 AP (Completed)

Escape the Forest of Fear: +500 AP (Completed)

Survive the Lunaria Mountains: +300 AP (Completed)

Apparently, the system had been assigning missions all along, and I'd been completing them without realizing it.

I felt like an idiot.

If I had checked my missions earlier, I might've been able to anticipate the dangers ahead.

But back then, I didn't have the luxury of checking my laptop.

Still...

I survived.

And that's what matters.

A whole year had passed.

The Temple's Opening was drawing near.

I glanced inside my Dimensional Ring.

Aside from my swords and a few other trinkets, there was barely anything left.

My food... my supplies...

Everything was gone.

That meant only one thing.

"It's time to return."

I caught a glimpse of my reflection.

My hair had grown long, and I hadn't taken a proper bath in a year.

"Haha... I look like a mess."

Yet, strangely, I felt refreshed.

After all, my body was overflowing with strength.

I closed my eyes and sank into deep meditation, reaching out to the dormant force within me.

Seconds later, I found myself standing there...

In a spiritual form, drifting in an endless sea of darkness.

A vast, boundless ocean of Black Aura.

I had discovered this place months ago.

This was my SSS-Rank Aura.

An unfathomable power, ready to be wielded... yet still beyond my reach.

The reason?

It was simple.

I attempted to draw upon that immense energy, and at once, a dark line crept up my arm.

In short, I possessed the power—

But I wasn't strong enough to wield it.

It was like trying to drink the ocean through a tiny straw.

Until I reached the required strength, I wouldn't be able to fully harness it.

However, there was one advantage...

With this endless sea of Aura, I could fight without the fear of running out.

That alone was an incredible asset.

...

I stored my laptop back in my Dimensional Ring and took one last look around.

This small, humble room had been my home for an entire year.

"Thank you."

I stepped forward, making my way toward the stairs.

"Will Smiley and Sad let me leave?"

This time, I had no choice—I had to go. If they stood in my way, I'd have no option but to fight them to the death.

I was D- Rank, but only a fool would think that was my limit.

And the reason for that was clutched firmly in my grip.

Balerion, the Black dread.

One of the few SS-Rank swords in existence.

Whenever I wielded Balerion, my strikes felt effortless—flawless. As if the sword was merely an extension of my own body.

With this blade, I could easily face opponents two entire ranks above me.

Unfortunately, I'd have to conceal it once I returned. There were only seven SS-Rank swords in the entire world, after all.

I reached the stairs—where they were waiting.

Smiley and Sad.

"Yo... did you guys miss me?"

I strolled toward them. The two turned, their expressions unreadable.

Dark Aura erupted around me, suffocating the air with killing intent.

"I'm sorry, but I have to go."

I stood my ground, bracing for their attack.

But contrary to my expectations, Smiley and Sad simply stepped aside, clearing my path.

My aura vanished. I gave them a wary glance.

"You're really letting me go? You're not planning to attack the moment I step forward, are you?"

They remained silent—motionless, like statues.

And strangely... I felt a sense of familiarity with these statues.

Alongside Balerion, these two had been my roommates for an entire year—even if they had been anything but kind.

As I passed between them, I took one final look before giving them a nod.

And at that moment...

Both Smiley and Sad nodded back.

I blinked in surprise before bursting into laughter, descending the stairs.

At the bottom, I turned to gaze upon the Sect of Shadows one last time.

I had never done this before, but... somehow, I knew this was their way of saying farewell.

So, I did the same.

I lowered my head in respect.

"Thank you for everything."

And with that—

I left the Black Mountain.

Snow crunched beneath my boots as I walked through the frozen wasteland.

"Ah... here we go again."

Balerion trembled violently in my grip.

"Calm down... you'll have blood soon enough."

I pressed forward, moving through the vast, snowy expanse—until suddenly, I stopped.

A familiar presence loomed ahead.

Two scythes.

Eight limbs.

The same monstrous form.

Except this one was much larger than the last.

I stood still, watching it. Then, a twisted grin spread across my face.

"Oi, over here!"

I called out to the Abomination.

Its head snapped toward me before it let out a deafening roar and charged.

"It's been a while, hasn't it?"

The Scythe Abomination lunged—

But I vanished just as its blade was about to hit.

Now perched on its arm, I casually patted the beast.

"Your cousin and I were close friends."

It swung its second scythe, but I was already gone.

Dancing around the Abomination, I swayed side to side, my movements erratic.

"Don't be like that. You and your cousin both tried to cut me down, after all."

"Do you know what your cousin did?"

The Abomination ignored my words and attacked, its speed terrifying.

In that instant—

Crimson blood splattered across the snow.

"He cut off my hand."

The monster's arm—and its scythe—flew through the air, severed in a single stroke.

It didn't even know what had happened.

It didn't even realize where the attack had come from.

Blood gushed from the wound as the Abomination howled in agony, wildly swinging its remaining blade.

Everything moved in slow motion, thanks to Hawk's Eye.

"As you can see, I like to return favors."

"And since your cousin isn't around anymore..."

"You'll have to take this in his place."

The Abomination's scythe reached my face—

But in that instant—

Ten copies of me appeared before it.

"Ten Thousand Steps of Shadow: Mirage."

The ten figures struck simultaneously, piercing through the Abomination's body.

The illusions merged back into one—now standing behind the beast.

And just moments later—

The Abomination's body exploded into ten separate pieces, collapsing into a crimson pool.

I wiped my blade, frowning.

"I still can't do more than ten strikes..."

In truth, those weren't clones.

They were afterimages.

"Mirage" was a flurry of strikes, executed so fast that it created the illusion of multiple versions of myself attacking at once.

In that single moment, I had struck ten times—making it appear as if there were ten of me.

But this was far from enough.

After all, Chun Ma, the previous wielder of this technique, could unleash ten thousand strikes in an instant.

I ran a hand through my hair, sighing.

"Looks like I still have a long road ahead."

That night—

A new predator was born within the Nightmare Lands.