

VILLAIN 24

Chapter 24 Homecoming (2)

Oclas Mountains – Starlight Family Headquarters

Inside an isolated chamber within the massive fortress, a gate that had remained sealed for an entire year suddenly lit up.

At that moment, a young man emerged.

His long black hair was longer than before.

His body—stronger.

His presence—sharper.

His pitch-black eyes now resembled swirling voids, as if threatening to consume everything around them.

And then, he grinned and shouted loudly—

"I'M BACK!"

My voice echoed through the chamber before fading into silence.

I found myself standing alone.

"Huh? No one here to welcome me?"

I scratched my head. I had imagined making a dramatic entrance...

"Oh well, doesn't matter."

I made my way toward the door ahead.

Outside, a lone guard leaned on his spear.

Bored to death, he yawned, having been forced to guard a single room for an entire year.

Not once had anything happened.

This place was dead—so dead, in fact, that he had grown to despise his own job.

But then...

The door he had believed would never open creaked wide.

From within, a young man with long hair and piercing eyes stepped out.

The guard's body stiffened as his mind struggled to process what he was seeing.

I flashed him a grin—one that bore a striking resemblance to my old friend, Smiley—and waved.

"Hey there~"

The guard snapped out of his daze, gripped his spear tightly, and shouted—

"INTRUDER!"

"Intruder?"

I watched as the spear lunged toward me, but thanks to my enhanced vision, it was practically moving in slow motion.

I sidestepped easily and placed my hand on his shoulder.

A wave of darkness swallowed him whole.

The guard's vision turned to nothing but pitch-black emptiness.

Sweat dripped down his forehead. His body trembled as confusion overtook him.

He tried to scream, to move—but no sound came out.

All he saw was darkness.

A few seconds later, he collapsed, unconscious from sheer terror.

I sighed as I looked down at his motionless form.

"Man... pointing a spear at me the second I arrive? That's just rude."

"Hey, Tyler! I heard you shouting—everything alright?"

Another guard rounded the corner, then froze.

His eyes darted between me and his unconscious friend on the floor.

Still wearing my Smiley-like grin, I waved at him.

"Hey there~"

The man immediately took a combat stance.

"Who are you?! How did you get in here?!"

"Huh?"

I tilted my head.

"How did I get in? Through the gate. You know, the one behind me."

I pointed toward the door behind me, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

But he wasn't listening.

"Intruder alert! I'm in the Sixth Wing—requesting backup!"

...Wait.

Did he just call me an intruder?

"Oi, you idiot. I'm Frey Starlight! Who the hell are you calling an intruder?!"

I casually walked toward him, but he didn't even acknowledge my words.

The moment I stepped into his range, white energy surged around his fists.

"A hand-to-hand fighter?"

So he relied on brute strength.

Too bad for him.

I raised my right palm and effortlessly blocked his punch.

"Weak."

"You—!"

He reeled back for another strike, but before he could, a swift chop to his neck knocked him out cold.

He crumpled at my feet.

I stood there for a moment, utterly bewildered.

"What the hell is going on? Why is everyone attacking me?!"

At the end of the hallway, dozens of armed guards assembled in formation.

Some wielded guns, others held bows.

They stepped forward, aiming straight at me.

"Eliminate the intruder!"

"Hah?"

Expression blank, I stared at them.

"Are we really doing this right now!?"

The fools fired.

Dozens of bullets and arrows rushed toward me—slow, predictable.

"Tch."

I reached into my ring and pulled out a sword.

I couldn't use Balerion here.

My mind calculated the perfect path through the incoming projectiles.

With my enhanced speed, I weaved through most of them effortlessly, deflecting the rest with my blade.

I flipped the sword, using its dull side, and dashed toward the guards ahead.

The man standing at the front barely registered my movement before I appeared before him.

"This won't kill you, but it'll hurt."

A swift strike to the head sent him straight to dreamland.

I moved like a ghost, slipping through their ranks at blinding speed.

Each time I struck, another guard fell unconscious.

"Second, third, fifth, tenth..."

A horror scene unfolded in the hallway.

A black shadow darted between the soldiers, leaving only unconscious bodies in its wake.

"Last one."

I stood silently, surrounded by fallen guards.

Not corpses—just people knocked out cold.

Exhale.

"Whether it's Nightmare Land or here... everyone just wants to kill me."

"Am I cursed or something?"

I stepped over the unconscious men.

"I need to find someone I know..."

But... who?

Ada? Maybe Carmen...

I turned a corner—and froze.

Before me stood a giant of a man.

His sheer size alone could easily block out four of me.

White hair.

A massive scar running over one eye.

He grinned menacingly as he looked at me.

"So, you're the intruder they were talking about?"

The giant took slow, deliberate steps toward me.

I'd met this guy before... What did Ada call him back then? General Byron? Or something like that...

"Hey, Baryon, Byron—whatever your name is... It's me, Frey."

"Pft. Impersonating a dead man? Ha! That's the worst survival attempt I've seen so far."

What the hell was this bastard talking about? We had met before—how could he not recognize me?

"There's only one similarity between you and Frey."

Byron smirked before continuing.

"You're both dead."

The moment he said that, Byron lunged at me.

"You're the size of an elephant, but your brain is even smaller..."

I instantly shifted to a serious stance—this guy wasn't playing around.

I watched as veins twisted across his skin while his right fist swelled. A surge of blinding white energy coursed through his arm before he launched a punch at me.

It was like watching a falling meteor.

Thanks to my Hawk's Eye, I could see his attack in slow motion, but even then, I could tell how devastating it was.

Pouring everything I had into my movement, I pushed Phantom Steps to its limits, barely managing to dodge his strike and reappear behind him.

The sheer force of his punch tore through the corridor, shaking the entire palace.

"Damn it."

I propelled myself forward.

This bastard was an A-rank. I couldn't take him on without Balerion.

Like a black arrow, I shot forward, putting as much distance as possible between me and the walking tank.

But then, his voice boomed behind me.

"Where do you think you're going?"

Byron planted his feet firmly into the ground, taking a combat stance. Then, with a series of powerful thrusts, he unleashed four consecutive energy blasts shaped like massive fists.

"Tch."

I twisted my body midair, channeling all the aura I could muster into my sword.

"Ten Thousand Steps of Shadow : Black Cutter."

Four black arcs shot forward, colliding with Byron's attacks. They weren't strong enough to stop them entirely, but they managed to divert their trajectory.

Byron's strikes crashed into the walls and floor, obliterating everything between us.

Using the opening, I bolted away.

He was far stronger than me, but I had the speed advantage. He was still a tank, after all.

Just as I thought I had escaped, a figure with white hair appeared in front of me.

"Hah... Finally, some excitement in this damn place."

My heart sank the moment I saw her.

"Damn it, Carmen... It's me! Frey! Stop!"

But battle instincts overpowered reason.

She moved so fast that even my enhanced Hawk's Eye struggled to track her. A surge of blazing white energy engulfed her arm—Stardust Fist.

A single punch from her carried the power of an S+ rank.

If that hit me, I was dead.

"Shit."

"Come... Balerion."

For a split second, I extended my left hand toward Carmen's incoming strike. A fragment of Balerion's form materialized—just enough to meet her fist.

I poured every ounce of my remaining strength into him.

A white inferno clashed against a dark storm.

Shock registered on Carmen's face.

But she was simply too much for me.

Her flames engulfed my body, sending me flying dozens of meters before I crashed into a wall.

I clutched my left arm, lying amidst the rubble.

"...That hurt."

If I hadn't used the hand with Balerion, I would've lost my entire arm.

In the next instant, Carmen appeared before me.

My eyes widened as she reached toward me.

But instead of attacking, her slender fingers grasped my chin, tilting my face toward her.

She studied me closely.

Then, after a long moment, she burst into laughter.

"It really is you..."

I let out a deep sigh.

"Spare me this bullshit..."