

## VILLAIN 361

### Chapter 361: A Toast to Madness (1)

"I understand there's a lot of tension between the four provinces, so I get why you wouldn't want to go with Lord Godfrey and his entourage," Draxler said, continuing his attempt to win Frey's favor.

"You're one of the empyreans' candidates, aren't you? I used to be one myself... but I lost miserably. Let me help you this time. Maybe at least one of us can make it out alive."

He offered his deal with the same laid-back smile.

The Ultras were deeply divided—despite all being part of the same faction, especially when it came to the Highbloods.

There were four main territories controlled by the four Lords:

— Shizclar in the east, ruled by Madam A.

— Cailed, the central and official capital of the Ultras, ruled by Lord Gavid Lindman.

— Aeonia in the west, under Lord Godfrey.

— And Nokron, the Eternal City in the south, under Lord Mirgo.

Though they were technically part of the same force—the Ultras—each lord ruled their region independently, in a structure worse than that of the Great Houses.

So Frey refusing to follow Godfrey was perfectly reasonable.

"Frey... this guy's suspicious. I have a really bad feeling about him," Clana whispered through a thin aura barrier.

"I know," Frey replied, nodding, "but we don't have a choice. We'll deal with him—for now. At least until we know where the keys are."

Though uneasy, Clana gave in to Frey's logic. He was the one in control. Always a step ahead, shielding her from danger. That made it hard for her to argue—especially when she was treated like this.

And yet, she didn't mind it at all. In fact, she appreciated every moment in her own quiet way.

"Alright, Draxler. Tell me how we get the keys," Frey asked, his focus unshaken.

Draxler nodded, still smiling. "There's only one way to get the teleportation pass. You'll have to go to the man who runs this place. They call him Father knoth."

"And where do we find him?"

Draxler pointed forward. "He works out of a massive tent not far from here. We'll find it if we keep going this way. Just so you know—this is the only way through. Even Lord Godfrey had to pass by him."

"Then lead the way."

"With pleasure."

With Draxler leading and Frey and Clana behind him, the three made their way toward the place that supposedly held the keys.

As they walked, Frey kept asking questions, trying to gather as much intel as possible.

"Why would someone like Godfrey need to go through knoth? Is he really that important?"

Draxler shook his head. "knoth is a Lowblood, but he's incredibly lucky. The teleportation magic here was cast a long time ago by a very powerful sorcerer. That sorcerer left the method of creating teleportation keys hidden away somewhere—and knoth was the only one who ever found it and figured it out."

"There's that kind of luck in this world?" Frey muttered, still finding it hard to believe.

"It's true. This place isn't just using teleportation magic .. it's also protected by a barrier that keeps Nightmare Beasts out of the mountain range. And the teleportation doesn't lead to one fixed destination. It has three different possible paths."

Draxler laughed out loud. "Since knoth is the only one who can ensure the right path and maintain the barrier, he ended up with some authority here. Now he basically does whatever he wants."

"I see..."

Frey nodded, mentally noting all the key information. He was already planning a way to get those keys as quickly as possible.

But Draxler didn't let the silence linger.

"Let's get back to you, Supreme Sovereign. Do you mind telling me your name?"

"You don't need to know it."

Frey kept his face hidden, just like his identity. He had no intention of giving Draxler even the smallest piece of information—especially with how closely the man was watching him.

"My apologies, my apologies. Then what about your cute little servant? She seems awfully weak. Did you bring her along for entertainment? I hear this land is pretty barren, after all. Kikiki..."

Draxler laughed mockingly, only to shut up when Frey's threatening presence spiked—intentionally so.

Clana didn't say a word the entire time. Everything going on was already overwhelming enough.

The rest of their walk continued in silence until they finally arrived.

"There it is."

Before them stood a massive tent—large enough to cover an entire skyscraper.

Frey was stunned at the sheer size of it. Even more so when he heard what was coming from inside.

Thundering music echoed through the ground, causing the very earth beneath them to shake.

"Didn't you say they call him Father Knoth? What the hell is this place?" Frey asked, eyeing the insane crowd lined up to enter the enormous tent.

"Ah... the title Father is just mockery," Draxler said with a chuckle. "Knoth is just a lecherous degenerate obsessed with sex and parties."

"I'm really expected to attend his party just to get the keys?" Frey asked suspiciously.

Draxler snapped his fingers.

"Exactly!!"

Frey and Clana exchanged glances before heading toward the massive entrance.

Once they arrived—surrounded by a huge crowd made up of both Lowblood and Highblood Ultras—they found a bizarre woman standing at the gate. Her head was completely shaved, she wore heavy makeup, and was nearly naked. Behind her stood four hulking guards.

As soon as she saw them, the woman smiled wide.

"Well, well... what do we have here? You folks here to party too?"

"Yes, please," Draxler replied with his usual smile. The pounding music grew louder with every step closer.

The woman nodded cheerfully, then snapped her fingers at one of the guards, who handed over a jar filled with a thick red liquid.

"Alright, gentlemen and ladies... you wanna party, right? Then drink."

She shoved the strange drink toward Frey's face, causing his expression to darken.

"What is this?"

She smiled wider, clearly amused.

"Something really good. Tastes great too."

Frey's suspicion only grew. He looked toward Draxler, but the latter simply shrugged.

"It's the only way in."

At that moment, several other Ultras approached, happily drinking the same red liquid before entering.

Still, Frey felt uneasy. Deeply so.

And just as he hesitated further—Clana stepped forward, grabbed the jar, and poured the drink down her throat without a second thought.

"You—!"

Frey shouted, shocked, while the strange woman clapped her hands with joy.

"Well done! You're officially ready to party!"

After downing the drink, Clana turned to Frey, pulling her mask back over her mouth.

"It's the only way in."

Hearing that, Frey sighed and reluctantly reached for the jar.

As he drank, a burning, vile sensation crawled down his throat. He tried to stop, but the woman lifted the jar again, forcing him to drink it all.

As soon as he finished, Draxler burst out laughing and wrapped his arms around them both.

"Remember... find Knoth, get the key. Now go! Enjoy the party!!"

With a loud shout, he shoved them both inside.

The moment they crossed the threshold, the deafening, demonic music exploded all around them. Lights flashed wildly overhead, changing color with every pulse.

All around them, people danced in madness, headbutting one another in sync with the beat, laughing and drinking like lunatics.

The place was massive—easily large enough to cover three football stadiums.

Frey found himself completely disoriented as a monstrous headache crashed down on him, growing worse with each flashing light and booming beat.

The pain was so intense, he felt like the world was about to flip upside down.

## Chapter 362: A Toast to Madness (2)

Gripping his head, Frey stumbled forward.

"What the hell did those bastards make me drink?! Some kind of alcohol?"

He questioned it—but quickly rejected the idea.

"No... that's impossible. Alcohol doesn't affect Awakened bodies."

It couldn't be alcohol. If it were, he wouldn't be feeling this way.

"What... the hell is happening to me?!"

The pain intensified with every step. Soon, he could barely even walk.

"Clana... we need to get out of here. Now."

He'd had enough. He was done with this place. But when he called her—

"Clana?"

—there was no reply.

"Clana?!"

Panic struck him like a lightning bolt. He pushed through the crowd, shouting her name—but no one seemed to mind him. Instead, they pulled him in as if he were one of them, laughing and dancing around him like he belonged there.

The headache got even worse, as if some kind of magic had been cast on him.

"Damn it! Where are you?!"

He grabbed someone he thought was her—only to find Ada Starlight staring at him in confusion.

"What the—?!"

He immediately stumbled back, only to realize upon a second glance that it was a completely different girl who went back to partying, unfazed.

"I'm hallucinating..."

He continued to stagger through the crowd, surrounded by maniacs still drinking that same thick red liquid.

"The drink..."

"The drink..."

"The drink..."

'Sticky red liquor... a substance capable of putting me in this state...'



"The drink..."

"The drink!"

"The drink!"

"Something filthy is coursing through my veins, mingling with my blood..."

"The blood!"

"The blood!"

"The blood!"

As the word repeated inside his ears, Frey finally realized something important.

"Blood...?! Demonic blood?!"

His eyes widened as he immediately clutched his mouth, realizing that what he had drunk was contaminated demon blood now writhing inside him.

He tried to vomit it out instantly—but it was far too late.

When Frey stood up again, the old madness he had once buried during his time in the Shadow Sect began to claw its way back.

The world spun around him once more, and to his shock, he saw Smiley and Sad dancing enthusiastically nearby—joined now by Angry.

The strange statues were dancing with joy, as if they'd finally been set free.

Behind them, sitting at a round table with a cup of the same drink in his hand, was the blue-eyed Engineer, raising his glass toward Frey.

In a sudden outburst of rage, Frey charged forward and punched the Engineer, sending him flying until he crashed into another table.

But when Frey looked again... he was stunned to find a stranger lying there, unconscious from the punch.

Turning once more, Frey saw a swarm of Scythe Abominations marching through the room, some of them attacking the humans now and then without warning.

"I feel like I'm going insane..."

He stumbled backward, disoriented, only to bump into someone else.

"Who now?!"

He turned angrily toward the figure—only to find himself staring directly into his own face.

"You!"

"I'm Frey!"

It was another Frey, one with black hair—a version of him from the days inside the Shadow Sect.

Then a third man bumped into them.

"Hey! Don't just stand there like a bunch of idiots!"

"Frey!" shouted both the first and second Freys in unison, recognizing the third—Frey before the transmigration, the one who had lived a wretched life before waking up in this world.

"Can't you guys shut up for a minute? I'm trying to relax here."

The three stared in confusion at the fourth Frey—the Writer. The man who had authored the story and lived the perfect life he always wanted.

Now all four of them sat at a table, staring at each other.

The silence was broken by the Writer Frey.

"...My novel is ruined."

"Shut up," snapped the black-haired Frey. "If your dumbass hadn't written this crap, we wouldn't be here to begin with!"

"Why are you yelling at him?" defended the Pre-Reincarnation Frey. "There was no way for him to know this would happen."

"We're in deep trouble, guys..." the current Frey sighed, sharing the same despair.

"The Demon King is watching us... there's a damn Engineer playing with our fate... and now he's trying to awaken some kind of nameless king within us?! What kind of cursed nonsense is this?!"

"I don't want to see that Nameless King among us," muttered the Writer Frey, agreeing with his counterpart.

"But what can we even do?" said one of them. "No matter how much we resist this fate, we keep following it anyway... Even suicide didn't work..."

"It's a curse, guys."

They all jumped in fear when a strange zombie slammed a disembodied brain onto the table.

"Who the hell are you?!"

The four Freys shouted together, while the zombie glared at them.

"I'm the Frey you buried under the dirt, you bastards!"

His rotten eyes burned with fury.

"You idiots... did you really have to dig me out like this?!"

The zombie turned toward the current Frey, addressing him directly.

"This is all your fault! Didn't your mother teach you never to drink anything given to you by strangers?!"

"|—"

"Shut up, you damned drunkard!"

The zombie Frey groaned and scratched his skull—only to remember it was empty.

"Gods damn all of you..."

"No one move!!"

Suddenly, Shadow Sect Frey shouted in alarm, drawing the others' attention.

"I think I dropped Balerion somewhere around here..."

His voice trembled in panic as Zombie Frey tossed his brain at him in disgust.

"You lost your sword?! You think that's bad?! Look at this!"

Zombie Frey raised the stump of his left arm, revealing a festering, rotted wound.

"You lost a blade—I lost my entire hand! And a few other vital parts, too!"

He dropped his head down, prompting the others to do the same—only to recoil in shock at the emptiness between the zombie's legs.

"Life hasn't been kind to the undead..."

Seated among them, the zombie took a long swig from the drinks on the table, then stared directly at the current Frey.

"Listen, man... I know you're starting to lose your mind from all the pressure..."

Pointing toward the others with the only finger left on his right hand, Zombie Frey spoke, blood dripping from his mouth.

"You're still at the beginning of the journey. What you've seen here, and what lies ahead—whether in this place, the Empire, or anywhere else... fate will show you no mercy. But remember this, Frey."

He gulped down more of the strange drink, continuing to speak without pause.

"You are you. Never lose yourself."

"..."

Frey wanted to say something—but remained silent.

"...Time to wake up. Good luck, man."

Without warning, all the other versions of Frey vanished, and a blinding light flipped his entire world upside down, sending him spiraling into darkness.

Chapter 363: A Toast to Madness (3)

When he opened his eyes again...

Frey found himself lying on the cold ground, surrounded by the unending celebration of the Ultras.

"...Did I pass out?"

As his senses returned, Frey felt a bit better. His body had started adapting to the demonic blood he drank earlier.

The headache wasn't completely gone, but it had dulled.

Still, he forced himself to move through the crowd—now searching for two people, not one.

"Where the hell did Clana go?!"

Just as he was about to activate the third-person pov to locate her, Frey was startled to see Clana herself stepping out from between the crowd, staring at him with a strange look in her eyes.

"Clana?! What happened?!"

He asked immediately, but she ignored the panic in his voice and replied with a slow, sleepy gaze.

"He's not here."

"Who?"

"Knoth."

She smiled, and Frey groaned, still trying to keep his focus despite the throbbing pain.

"Then let's keep searching."

Too distracted by the headache and focused on finding Knoth, Frey didn't stop to assess Clana's condition—despite her drinking from the same demonic blood as him.

She laughed softly the moment he urged her to keep going.

"Why?"

"What do you mean, why? We need to find the others!"

Frey snapped, growing frustrated at the delay. But Clana continued to hover around him, still wearing that odd expression.

"None of that matters anymore... Frey, our friends are already dead. Didn't you see the army heading toward them?"

"...What are you talking about?"

Frey clenched his head in pain, forcing himself to endure both the pounding headache and Clana's incoherent rambling.

"They're all going to die anyway. Why should we bother chasing after them?"

"You're not in your right mind."

"I'm perfectly fine..."

Taking his hands into hers and stepping closer—closer than ever before—Clana looked him straight in the eye.

"All that matters now is you and me."

"I'm here for you."

"Clana..."

"And you're here for me."

"Stop it," Frey growled, tightening his grip on her shoulders. "You don't even know what you're saying."

He tried to push her away.



But she didn't let him. With a swift movement, she threw herself at him, wrapping her arms around his body and pulling him into a sudden embrace—until their faces were inches apart, and her lips met his in a deep kiss.

Frey's numbed senses grew even duller as the headache fused strangely with the overwhelming feeling of the kiss.

Her white hair blocked his vision completely.

And then... under the spotlight's glare...

He saw it.

Her hair turned black.

And in his arms stood a different girl, staring at him with dark, lifeless eyes.

Frey immediately leapt backward, gasping, while Clana stood confused by his sudden reaction.

"What...?" she asked, clearly shaken, as if part of her mind had returned.

Frey, meanwhile, was still processing what he saw.

"You're not her..."

Clana's smile faded into something bitter, and she slowly backed away.

"...I see. Sorry, then."

As she walked off into the crowd—

Frey clenched his teeth and summoned Balerion.

Without hesitation, he stabbed himself hard in the right thigh, letting the waves of pain override the remnants of the headache. His eyes began to glow with a violet light.

"I've had enough of this nonsense."

Drawing the Dark Sister, he dashed forward—appearing instantly in front of Clana, who barely had time to react.

With a swift strike to the side of her neck, he knocked her unconscious in an instant.

After laying her body away from the madness of the Ultra's depraved party...

Frey vanished into the crowd in a blur, leaving behind nothing but afterimages.

In a matter of seconds, he dropped several of them dead—reappearing and disappearing with savage precision, swinging his blades like a phantom.

"Where is Knoth?!"

"Huh?"

Slash!!

"Where is Knoth?!"

Frey kept asking the same question as he cut down everyone around him, mercilessly hunting for the man who was supposed to be the key to their escape from this place.

Minutes into the massacre...

Frey had already slaughtered dozens.

"I should've done this from the beginning."

He continued to tear through the celebrating Ultras without pause.

The once-rowdy party had now transformed into a bloodbath—fitting for a hellish place like this.

"Where is he?"

BOOM

"Where is he?!!"

BOOOOM

The entire tent exploded not long after the battle began, as Frey singlehandedly decimated most of the Ultras present.

Unexpectedly, the majority turned out to be from the lower-blood ranks. He rarely encountered any high-bloods—and even when he did, they were far too drunk to fight back.

Now, standing in the middle of a crater of carnage, drenched in blood...

Frey stared coldly at the short, obese man kneeling before him—arms outstretched, holding a golden key.

"So you're Knoth? Never thought the key to everything would be this pitiful."

"Please! Spare my life!"

Knoth fell to his knees, half-naked, covering himself with gold and jewels.

But Frey showed no mercy.

With a single motion, he sent the man's head flying and snatched the final key from his corpse.

At that moment, Frey felt a massive wave of powerful auras converging toward him.

"So they've found out..."

Carrying Clana in his arms...

Frey dashed forward at full speed, evading the constant bombardment from the Ultras chasing him toward the teleportation circle.

But he was confident in his speed—confident in his ability to reach it unscathed. And he did.

Using the key...

He entered the circle with Clana, disappearing just before the Ultras could catch up.

Frey had escaped.

And from atop a tall building carved into the mountain's edge...

Draxler had seen everything.

Still wearing that same smile...

He pulled out a violet crystal and pressed down, activating it.

At that moment, a holographic projection of a woman in an elegant dress appeared before him.

Draxler immediately bowed low.

"Mission complete, my great witch Beatrice. They're on their way... to the promised place."

Still bowing...

Beatrice smiled from the other side of the crystal, her satisfaction radiating through the magical link.

"Well done."

The witch's game was far from over.

She was still playing with their fate .

Chapter 364: The Iron Emperor Returns

Whether it was the Ultras or the Empire...

The two continents had entered a crucial era in their centuries-long history.

After a string of earth-shattering events .. ranging from the brutal battle in which the Ultras emerged victorious at the Bay of Shezclar, to the resurgence of the ancient order that had clawed its way out

from the grave to rule once again—everything began to fall, like dominoes, each piece larger and heavier than the last.

A single act of abduction had been enough to turn the entire world upside down.

The future was now shrouded in fog, and no one could predict what was to come.

But one thing was certain:

Nothing would ever be the same again.

...

...

...

—The Holy Island of Sicily—

A paradise for the Church's faithful and worshippers of the Lord of Light.

A blessed land, nourished by a heavenly blue waterfall that descended from the skies, sustaining all life within.

The Holy Island was akin to a piece of heaven granted solely to the true believers. The Church forbade ordinary people from entering.

In this way, the land had remained serene and sacred for generations.

But that peace shattered today.

The ground trembled violently, and the Church's followers stood paralyzed, unable to do anything as they witnessed a nightmare unfold before their eyes.

BOOM!!

A deafening explosion echoed as the main gate of the Grand Cathedral was obliterated, and someone emerged from the rubble.

The Church's High Bishop, Joseph Blatter, coughed violently as he struggled to stand, barely managing to stay upright.

He felt the warm stream of blood running down his lips—internal damage from a single strike delivered by the man who had descended upon the island from nowhere...

"Sir Alon..."

Blatter uttered the name of the one responsible for his state—Sir Alon, the old man walking slowly toward him, leaning on an ancient wooden cane.

Behind him stood Oliver Khan and the servant Gas, who had accompanied him.

Surrounded by archbishops, priests, and every follower of the Church, all stood frozen in place—crushed beneath the overwhelming aura of Sir Alon, forced to witness the scene with bloodshot eyes.

"I thought I'd once drawn the line for you, Blatter."

With a sudden kick too fast for even a Bishop of SS rank to perceive, Blatter was sent crashing into the adjacent wall, shattering it from the sheer force.

"You've isolated yourself on this island, scheming against your own kind... poisoning their minds under the name of your cursed Lord..."

Blatter spat out more blood, forcing himself to his feet again.

"We are the Church... the devout followers of the Lord of Light. We've lived our lives according to His will. No one has the right to question that—not even you, Iron Emperor. The Lord of Light is our only leader."

Trying to maintain his composure before his disciples, Joseph Blatter cursed Alon from the depths of his soul.

'So he was alive... hiding all this time.'

This was the true reason the Church had refrained from acting openly against the Empire—they feared the return of this man.

And Blatter wouldn't be surprised if he was the reason the Lord of Light had ordered House Valerion's extermination before that of the Ultras.

Sir Alon—the Iron Emperor—gritted his teeth, enraged by what he heard. He let out a thunderous roar that shattered every stained-glass window in the cathedral, rupturing the eardrums of all present.

"The Lord of Light!!"

Losing control of his fury and surging aura, Sir Alon forced most of the gathered crowd to their knees from sheer pressure.

"When your so-called Lord chose a champion, remind me—what was his name?"

Grabbing Blatter by the throat, Alon spat venomous words at his face and the faces of every priest watching.

"Valerion! Kazes Valerion!"



Sir Alon's hand, much like his son's, was a weapon of destruction. With a single motion, he hurled Blatter across the air, smashing him into his followers—who barely managed to catch his broken body.

"From the beginning, you built this cursed faith out of nothing. Even your 'Lord' never chose a single one of you."

"My foolish son might not have seen the rot festering beneath your blood-stained robe, but I can see it at a glance... Blatter."

"Clinging to your hollow creed, you've used the name of your false god to do as you please... upon lands built by men, lived upon by men, and bled for by men!!"

Sir Alon erupted with power, no longer able—or willing—to restrain himself.

Not after witnessing what the Empire had become.

"You claim to be the devout followers of the Lord of Light... then where is He?!"

BOOOOM!!!

The ancient cathedral, built ages ago, crumbled under the pressure of a single man.

"Here I stand, destroying everything you've ever built. If your Lord exists—why doesn't he strike me down?!"

"I'll tell you why—because this Lord of Light is nothing but a mirage. A convenient illusion you've used to blind your flock and the world around you."

Deliberately provoking them, Sir Alon forced the clergy to scream as they tried to break his aura—calling him a heretic.

But the Iron Emperor remained untouched.

He simply raised his aura higher still, crushing them back to the ground with divine wrath.

"The only ruler over this land..."

"Is me, and no one else!!!"

Gripping the bishop before his own followers, Sir Alon dragged Joseph Blatter behind him as he departed, flanked by Oliver Khan and Gas.

"From this moment on, the Church will act under my command. You won't hide away on your cursed island any longer... Not while I still draw breath."

"You have no right!" Blatter shouted, only to receive a crushing punch from Sir Alon that forced him into silence.

"I have every right. It's either that... or you die here."

Imposing his authority and his system—

Taking the Church's highest authority as his prisoner—

Sir Alon departed the Holy Island, leaving behind only ruin in his wake.

Following the Iron Emperor, Oliver Khan could do nothing but marvel at the sight.

"In a single day... he took over the entire Church."

The old man moved with terrifying speed when it came to ruling the Empire.

Without even turning his head, Sir Alon spoke to Oliver while continuing to walk, having already chosen his next target.

"You said in your report that House Starlight is the only one still retaining its full strength, didn't you?"

Oliver nodded instantly.

"Yes. When the Empire launched its sudden war, they were the only ones who refused to join the offensive—because their current Lord forbade it."

"Excellent. Then prepare that Lord for me. Immediately."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Oliver rushed off to carry out the orders.

The Masked Man, despite his own rank, now found himself simply following the lead of the Iron Emperor—awoken at last from his long slumber.

He had wanted to charge into battle earlier, to help rescue the princess. But the current Lord of House Starlight had stopped him convincing him to wait.

Oliver no longer knew how things would unfold from here on out. But one thing he was certain of:

Their only remaining hope now... was Sir Alon.

Chapter 365: Lord Starlight's Plan

—Castlevania Province – The Emperor's Castle—

Inside a grand hall carpeted in red, its golden walls gleaming faintly—

The air was thick with tension. And the woman who kept tapping her foot against the ground was doing nothing to help.

"Calm down, Carmen."

Ada spoke with a frown, visibly annoyed by the constant noise.

"Sorry, sorry... I just don't feel well."

Carmen sighed and leaned against the wall.

Both women were dressed in the official black-and-white military uniform of House Starlight.

"Why are you the one this anxious? I'm the inexperienced one here, remember?"

"You only say that because you don't know the Iron Emperor..."

Ada glanced at Carmen with growing curiosity.

A woman of Carmen Starlight's age didn't get shaken easily. She had lived long enough to witness and endure much. Seeing her like this raised a question in Ada's mind—

"What kind of person is Sir Alon?"

"He's an ancient monster. A heartless tyrant. A mad dictator..."

"Is he really that terrifying?"

Carmen nodded without hesitation.

"Many call me an old woman now... but Sir Alon was already old when I was still a baby lying in a cradle."

"To see him again, with the same face... the same arrogant presence... it rattles me."

Carmen became lost in thought, recalling the Iron Emperor—the very man who had once united the great noble houses.

She forgot for a moment where they were. But then, too late, she remembered.

"Ah... sorry, Ada. I shouldn't be passing my anxiety onto you. Especially now that you're about to meet him."

"It's fine... I'm okay."

Ada also exhaled deeply, doing her best to stay composed.

Sir Alon had kept them waiting for a full hour since summoning them.

Ada was certain this was one of his psychological tactics—an intentional show of dominance.

She refused to crack under it.

Then, at last, the doors opened, and Oliver Khan returned.

"The Emperor is ready to see you. Please follow me."

The moment of truth had come.

Ada rose with a simple nod and followed behind Oliver—Carmen at her side.

Step by step...

They walked down the corridor leading to the imperial throne room, the pressure growing heavier with every step.

That suffocating aura ..

It pressed especially hard on Ada, who found it harder and harder to remain calm.

Especially knowing that the man awaiting them was a monster who had lived since her ancestors' time.

"No need to panic... Ada Starlight."

Just as the pressure reached its peak, Oliver Khan extended his own aura—

Shielding Ada, covering her from the Emperor's overwhelming presence.

"You're the Lord of Starlight now. You have every right to stand here before the Emperor... You've already come a long way."

As soon as he said those words, Carmen released her aura as well, enveloping Ada in its warmth.

"Ugh... I should've done that before he did. Damn it."

Carmen scratched her head in mild irritation at how Oliver had handled the moment.

"Whatever... Ada, I'm terrible at motivational speeches. Just keep doing what you've been doing. That alone is enough."

"Carmen..."

Seeing the people who believed in her, remembering the path she'd walked and the one she wanted to save...

Ada smiled once again, stepping forward with renewed resolve.

"Thank you... both of you."



Once Oliver Khan confirmed Ada was ready, he stepped aside and opened the grand door before them.

Inside. .seated atop the throne once occupied by Maekar Valerion ..was Sir Alon.

The chamber was dimly lit, and the shadows only made the Iron Emperor's golden, glowing eyes stand out even more.

The moment they laid eyes on him, everyone in the room bowed in unison.

"We greet the Emperor!"

All eyes were on Sir Alon—but his gaze was fixed solely on Ada.

"So you're the current Lord of House Nova Starlight? ...I must say, I'm a bit surprised."

He spoke with casual disdain, but Ada raised her head confidently, unfazed by the mockery.

"That's right. I am the fifth Lord of House Starlight. Ada Starlight."

She declared her name firmly, trying to assert her position before the Iron Emperor, who clearly scoffed at her meager strength compared to her title.

"Hoh? Is that so?"

Sir Alon chuckled, leaning on his cane and striking it against the floor, releasing a gust of wind that surged through the chamber.

"Tell me then... Lord Starlight—why is it that your house was the only one to survive while all others perished? Did you deliberately avoid sending your forces to the war?"

Despite his confrontational tone, Ada simply nodded.

"That's correct. House Starlight refused to take part in this war from the beginning. We chose instead to provide support from behind the lines."

Sir Alon raised an eyebrow at the honesty of the frail lord standing before him, pressing further:

"And what was your reason? Know this—your answer will determine the fate of your entire House."

The Iron Emperor's words came with an immense wave of pressure. Even Carmen, an SS-rank powerhouse, struggled to withstand the crushing force.

Let alone Ada, who was the main target of that wrath.

Ada braced herself, gathering her will before she finally began to speak.

"With all due respect to the ruling family... House Starlight became involved in this chaos not to wage war on the Ultras, but to rescue those who were abducted from the Temple ten days ago."

"Blindly charging into war and taking the bait thrown by the enemy would've been pure foolishness—especially when the lives of the abducted were hanging in the balance. When my reasoning was rejected, I had no choice but to pull back my forces. I refused to let yet another family fall victim to the trap laid by the Ultras."

She paused briefly to catch her breath, prompting Sir Alon to take over again.

"So what you're saying is... you have a plan to rescue the abducted, don't you?"

The Emperor rose from his throne, suddenly roaring with fury.

"Foolishness!!!"

Ada flinched as another wave of terrifying pressure crashed over her.

"I've heard your only brother is among the abducted. How do you plan to save him when he could be anywhere on an entire continent you know nothing about? For all you know... he might already be dead."

"He's alive!!"

This time, Ada was the one who shouted back, causing Sir Alon to narrow his eyes, demanding an explanation.

Ada turned to Carmen, who nodded and pulled out a magical device shaped like a crystalline orb.

The moment it was activated, a detailed 3D map of the planet shimmered into the air, illuminating the entire hall.

"Life has forced me to live with a strange brother—one who hides many secrets from me."

Ada stepped closer to the map, her eyes focused on a specific location.

"He would always come home covered in wounds, with a soul weighed down by burdens... His hair turned white before he even reached twenty."

"All of this happened while I was away, oblivious to his pain. So, as his sister, I had no choice but to take action—to ensure that the day never comes when my brother dies somewhere I can't even reach him."

She pointed to a blinking red marker glowing persistently on the western edge of the Ultras Continent.

"My brother is alive. He's somewhere in the western region of the Ultras Continent."

After his return from Londor, Ada had forced Frey to implant a magical device linked directly to his heart .. allowing her to track his life signal in real time.

That was Ada Starlight's only assurance—the reason she had kept her composure through all this, despite Frey vanishing into enemy territory.

"I can also confirm that the Ultras are not holding him. He's been moving non-stop throughout the continent for the last ten days!"

"They're alive out there, fighting to find a way back home, my lord! So how can you expect me to join a doomed war instead of gathering every ounce of strength I have to try and save them?!"

Seeing a young girl standing before him—a fragile figure not even a quarter of his age—speaking her mind with such courage, accomplishing what even the strongest had failed to do...

Sir Alon couldn't help but laugh.

His deep laughter echoed through the chamber, leaving everyone around stunned.

It was the first time the old man had laughed since his return to the Empire—a realm that had brought him nothing but burdens.

"Very well done, Lord Starlight!"

Sir Alon sprang from his seat, each step punctuated by the thud of his cane against the ground.

"I never expected to find someone worthy amidst the pile of trash my son left behind..."

Glancing over the map Ada had presented, along with the valuable intel she'd compiled, Sir Alon nodded in approval and stepped forward with swift strides.

"Follow me... Lord Starlight."

Passing her by, the Iron Emperor commanded Ada to walk behind him, catching her off guard.

"Where are we going, my lord?"

"Your plan is excellent, Lord Starlight."

Without even looking back, Sir Alon continued, clarifying his intentions.

"You've done well. But you lack the combat power needed to go and save your brother yourself, do you not?"

She nodded silently.

As the current head of House Starlight, Ada had intended to rely on Emperor Maekar Valerion and his explosive power in battle. But he had vanished—leaving for war without a word.

And now that Sir Alon had returned, she hoped this time things would be different—and they were.

"What I mean is... your plan is worth executing, Lord Starlight."

"But in order to see it through... we'll need to awaken those who laid down their arms long ago."

Sir Alon exited the hall, followed closely by Carmen, Ada, and the masked Oliver Khan—heading toward an entirely different place.

"It's time to awaken the entire Old Oath."

Chapter 366: The Puppet City (1)

– 13 Days Since the Kidnapping –

On another desolate night, the stars were the only source of light.

A dust-covered, sand-buried magic circle began to glow again—its first activation in what seemed like ages.

But now, it shimmered once more, shaking off the filth and allowing Frey and Clana Starlight to pass through.

As soon as they arrived, the two found themselves still inside the mountain pass that split the ridge, but this time they had reached the far end. They were now closer to their friends than ever before.

"Where are we?" Clana asked in confusion as her mind gradually cleared, recovering from the madness caused by the demonic blood she had consumed.

"We're on the other side," Frey replied. "Rest for now until the headache and hallucinations fade completely."

Heeding his advice, Clana sat down, one hand gripping her head, the other pressing against her forehead.



"Frey... what exactly did we drink back there?"

Clana genuinely wanted to know. She had never experienced anything like it before, especially given she couldn't recall a single moment from the chaos of that insane party.

Frey didn't hide anything. He answered plainly.

"It was demon blood."

The moment he said that, Clana's face darkened as memories of Exevir came rushing back.

"Are we going to turn into something like those things?!"

Unable to bear the thought of becoming a kind of zombie, panic began to take over.

"Calm down. You'll be fine."

With a long sigh, Frey sat down beside her.

"What we drank wasn't pure demon blood. It was just ordinary alcohol—mixed with a bit of demon blood to amplify the effect. The Ultras do it all the time. As long as we didn't consume too much, we should be safe."

"Are you sure?!"

"Yes." Frey nodded.

"You'll be alright. Just focus on circulating your aura and purging the toxins."

Revealing more of the obscure knowledge he possessed, Clana nodded, not asking for further details—something Frey appreciated.

She used her Stardust Flow technique to speed up her recovery, her white hair fluttering around her glowing body as her healing accelerated.

During that time, scattered images started flashing through her mind ..memories of what had happened inside the tent... and the party.

After a few more minutes, she stood and walked toward Frey, who hadn't strayed far.

"Clana... are you fully recovered?"

"Yes. I'm fine now."

"Good. Let's move."

At his signal, the two bolted forward, using aura to boost their bodies and move faster.

Frey led the way, as always, shielding Clana from harm should anything happen.

Especially in a place like this—trapped between mountains—they had no choice but to keep moving forward until they reached the end of the pass.

But Frey had already sensed numerous strange auras that kept him on high alert, wondering what awaited them at the end.

Draxler had said the magic circle could lead to three different paths.

But the question now was—which one had they taken?

Lost in thought, Frey was interrupted by Clana, who sounded hesitant.

"Frey..."

"What is it?"

"Back at that party... did I do anything strange?"

"..."

"Sorry for the sudden question. I'm just confused."

Frey didn't respond right away, which made Clana rephrase her question.

But soon, he gave her the words she needed to hear.

"Nothing happened, Clana. We escaped from that place. No need to dwell on it."

"...Alright."

Clana nodded reluctantly, while Frey's expression darkened even more—those strange auras were getting stronger.

A few more minutes passed.

They reached the end of the pass and stopped without a word, stunned by what lay ahead.

"...Incredible," Clana whispered, her eyes wide as she gazed upon the massive city at the end of the path.

With structures that seemed straight out of a Victorian-steampunk era, and factory chimneys constantly spewing black smoke...

It was a marvel of architecture, its lands meticulously constructed, hidden behind an ornate iron gate that separated them from the world inside.

Then suddenly—

The gate creaked open on its own, as if it had been waiting for them, inviting them in.

The view from the inside was even more breathtaking.

Standing at the entrance, Clana voiced her awe.

"I never imagined I'd find a city like this here... in the land of the Ultras."

But it wasn't just any city, and she realized that the longer she looked.

"...Why is it so empty?"

The streets were deserted. The gate was unmanned. And the vast grounds behind it—completely silent.

Clana wanted to move forward and see what lay inside, but Frey's hand immediately grabbed her tightly.

"Frey... what is it?!"

Startled by his sudden grip and the dark expression on his face, Clana instantly understood that something was wrong.

"Clana, listen to me carefully—burn this into your memory."

"From this moment on, no matter what happens once we enter that place... I want you to focus solely on survival. Think of nothing else."

"Frey... what are you—"

"Don't get involved in any fights. Don't do anything unnecessary!"

Shocked by Frey's sudden intensity, Clana could only nod several times in agreement.

"Good."

With a heavy sigh, Frey took the first step forward—Clana right behind him.

"But Frey... what exactly is this place?"

His reaction wasn't normal, and that alone made her even more anxious.

He naturally recognized the place—he had described it many times in the distant past.

"The Puppet City."

Crossing through the gate, the two entered quickly. They had no choice .. passing through it was the only way to reach their friends.

After Frey's earlier reaction, Clana was on full alert, ready for an ambush from anywhere.

But the attack never came.

Instead, she was shocked to see people living their lives peacefully.

Men and women in fine clothes strolled through the streets. Some wore traditional police uniforms and seemed to be responsible for maintaining order.

But upon closer inspection, Clana realized something critical.

"These... aren't humans??"

"Welcome to the Puppet City!"

One of the strange policemen jumped out in front of them with a beaming smile. But Frey immediately sliced his neck, dropping him to the ground.

From the severed neck, a strange blue fluid leaked out, along with sparks and exposed wires.

"A robot?" Clana frowned.

"No—a puppet." Frey corrected instantly.

He dashed forward, and Clana followed behind.

As they moved deeper into the city, all its inhabitants turned their heads, staring at them with glowing red eyes from afar.

"They're all puppets?"

From the men, to the women... even the children.

All puppets.

"They're the cursed inhabitants of this place... we need to get out, fast."

Continuing forward and destroying anything in their path, Frey and Clana reached the heart of the city in record time—only to stop abruptly as they stared grimly at what lay ahead.

Unlike the clean, elegant streets they had just passed, this place was in complete chaos.

Hundreds of bodies were scattered everywhere—some spilling red blood, others blue.

The corpses of both humans and puppets alike. Along the road stood spears impaling those less fortunate, hoisting them into the air.

At the center of this carnage, a giant banner stood proudly. Both Frey and Clana read it at the same time:

"hypocrite."

"Ahahahahahahaha! Welcome, welcome, my esteemed guests!"

A voice they had never heard before boomed across the city, amplified by countless loudspeakers.

"Today, we have two special visitors! Guests from another continent... and from a prestigious family too! Kihihhi, what a delightful pair!"

The voice was thrilled, and the city gradually fell into eerie silence.

"Frey..."

Clana stepped closer to him, anxiety on her face.

And rightly so.

The streets around them began to fill with puppets approaching slowly—surrounding them.

Some were larger than others—a giant police officer walking on all fours, over four meters tall, and a fat clown dancing between the crowd while laughing maniacally.

All stared at them with red, glowing eyes.

"My dear guests, show me your true worth. Let me see what color of blood you're made of!"

As his words echoed, the puppets charged at them in madness—all at once.

Frey drew his swords, his body now shrouded in a violet aura of power.

Surrounded by thousands of puppets attacking simultaneously, Frey unleashed a massive wave of shadow aura that tore through the horde with terrifying force—clearing a path.

"Now! Clana! Go!"

His shout snapped her out of her daze. She rushed forward at full speed, while Frey followed behind, cutting down every puppet that approached.

With each destroyed puppet, red and blue blood gushed forth. Still, they kept coming.

Among them, the giant officer and the clown were insanely powerful, and there were many of them.



It was enough to make Frey curse as he amplified his voice with aura...

"Simon Manus!!!"

Chapter 367: The Puppet City (2)

Unleashing a destructive wave, he cleaved both the clown and the giant sentinel in two, all while continuing his rampage and roaring ..

"Come out and face me! Simon Manus!!!"

He kept shouting his name.

The speakers crackled back to life.

"Hoho? Who would've thought our dear Frey Starlight actually knows me... I'm truly impressed."

Slash!!

Forced to fight against the relentless onslaught of puppet soldiers, Frey had no choice but to keep them at bay—at least until Clana could escape the city.

"Cut the crap and face me already!"

"And why would I do that, little devil?"

Something strange happened ..

The mechanical giant sentinel rose again, and the severed body of the fat clown began reassembling itself.

"I've prepared plenty of gifts for you. No need for me to show up and ruin the fun."

That clown puppet in particular was absurdly strong. Its belly split in half like a giant mouth, trying to swallow Frey whole.

But he dodged the attack with ease.

"That damn Zombozo..."

Harnessing more aura and unleashing his power even further ..

Frey began to tear through the puppets faster and more brutally, putting on a terrifying display of destructive might.

Balerion and Dark Sister—both swords were drenched in blue and red blood as Frey exhaled steaming heat from his mouth with every kill.

Amid the chaotic madness.

Frey's eyes widened as he saw something strange happening across the battlefield...

He saw them clearly.

Some puppets still alive were gathering in sorrow around those already destroyed...

Puppets of children, men, women, the elderly...

All kinds were there.

And Frey had already realized the truth.

His teeth clenched as he continued slaughtering them.

Then, without warning ..

Frey froze in place as an overwhelming surge of aura pressure slammed into him, forcing him to turn immediately.

"SS Rank?!!"

As his focus shifted ..

He saw it.

A single puppet standing atop one of the massive buildings...

A black puppet with glowing red eyes and long black hair, holding two red katanas.

"Frey Starlight. Just like your father, Abraham Starlight... you are truly extraordinary."

Simon Manus spoke again through the speakers, anticipation thick in his voice.

"Your father caused many disasters across this land in the distant past... and this is one of his many victims, returned to exact vengeance!!"

Frey's face grew serious as he released his full power.

"Blood Form."

Ready for battle, he faced the puppet that now leapt toward him—

All while Simon Manus continued, refusing to remain silent.

"Let me introduce you to the former Lord of the Ultras—the man your father killed! Val!"

One of the ancient Lords, slain long ago by Abraham Starlight, had returned...

Now reborn as an enraged puppet, thirsting for revenge.

Val, seeing Abraham in Frey, launched his full strength from the very start. Their swords clashed with violent force as the true battle began.

"Abraham Starlight may be dead... so it's only natural the son pays the price, right? Kikiki..."

Between Simon Manus' twisted laughter, and the puppet army now surrounding Frey—led by an SS-Rank puppet of vengeance—

Chaos once again engulfed the Puppet City.

...

...

...

— The Tea Party —

Inside her splendid garden...

Beatrice sat alone this time, sipping from her cup and thoroughly enjoying the performance unfolding before her.

"Simon Manus... you've always been a deranged old man."

In front of her, a screen displayed everything happening in the Puppet City, in the highest possible resolution.

"You say you don't follow demons, but another race entirely... then what's the difference between us? Hehehehe."

She laughed, recalling Simon's twisted hobbies.

Unlike her, who crafted her own homunculus..

Simon's puppets were something else entirely.

Using a strange blue substance he'd obtained from the very entities he claimed to worship—

Simon had somehow transformed living humans into puppets that resembled machines, turning them into the "art pieces" he so often raved about.

Stripping them of their humanity, making their bodies out of steel ..

Simon Manus had created elegant monsters shaped like dolls.

"We demons gave humans our blood. But you... you poisoned them with your strange toxins. So tell me—what's the difference between us?"

Enjoying the spectacle...

Beatrice watched Frey Starlight's battle against the former Lord, now turned into a puppet by Simon—along with the entire population of the city.

All those puppets Frey had slaughtered so far...

They had once been real people.

People who had lived lives just like his.

And he had known that from the very beginning.

Even so—he didn't hesitate to destroy them, offering them some form of release.

He was incredibly strong...

But he was still just one man.

"I wonder... how much longer can you last, Frey Starlight? Especially with someone weighing you down? Hehehe."

At Simon's request...

Beatrice had lured Frey into the Puppet City, making Simon yet another piece in the witch's grand game—

A move that birthed the chaos unfolding now.

"There's not much time left before we reach the final phase of the game, so I do hope you'll give me a proper show... Simon Manus and Frey Starlight."

...

...

...

While Frey Starlight fought for his life far from them—

The rest of the elite class lay hidden among the Ultras, waiting for his return.

Three days had passed.

Phoenix Sunlight had ventured out again and again during those days, hoping to find Frey if he ever got close.

But he never appeared.

Most of the elite class had shown a willingness to wait—

But the longer Frey delayed, the more others began to consider leaving.

"What the hell is taking Frey Starlight so long?!"

Daemon Valerion cursed, having lost his patience ..

Surrounded by the rest of the elite class, all of whom had reached their limits.

Their food had run out, and the only things keeping them going were aura and the water Seris continued to create for them.

Despite having already discovered the route back home, the decision to wait under such harsh conditions had created a tense atmosphere.

Figures like Scarite Sunlight and her brother were ready to leave.

But on the other hand, some made it clear they would wait for Frey no matter how long it took.

"I'm not moving from this spot until Frey gets here. Anyone who wants to leave—go ahead."

Danzo spoke indifferently as he wrapped a white bandage around his swollen fists.

Like Danzo, Snow, Ghost, and Sansa were the most determined to stay.

This growing divide slowly began to fracture the elite class.

Sansa, who had isolated herself from the others, often immersed herself in trying to control her shadows and the power her body now carried.

If she had been able to go to him—she would've done so without hesitation.

But in her current state, she could do nothing but wait.

While meditating—

Her dark eyes wandered, lost in thought...



'Even though he's not here... I often feel like he's watching me from somewhere...'

There was no concrete proof that the final survivor was Frey.

But Sansa was certain it was him.

She had no idea about the third-person perspective skill Frey had occasionally used on her ..

Yet still, she could feel his presence in an eerie, inexplicable way.

And that alone convinced her he was alive.

She wanted to master her power quickly to prepare for what was coming, fully intent on waiting until the end.

But everything changed—

When Selena suddenly stood up, a dark expression etched into her face.

"Selena... what's wrong?"

Seris, who sat beside her, asked.

Her words drew the attention of everyone nearby, all eyes now fixed on Selena.

Then, with a heavy heart and unable to bring herself to say the full truth—

The witch finally spoke, delivering a message none of them were ready to hear.

"The last remaining marker of the final survivor..."

That fragile thread of hope connecting them to the one person still unaccounted for—

"It's gone."

With a single sentence—

Despair gripped the hearts of some, while a faint light of hope still lingered in others.

Chapter 368: Role reversal (1)

The Puppet City

A land claimed by the Hollow known as Simon Manus ..

A city he made his lair by transforming its people and all who lived there into puppets, mechanical and lifeless, mere "masterpieces" in his eyes.

Unlike the rest of the Lower Bloodlands, the city retained all the essentials for human life.

But there were no humans left to benefit.

Only hollow puppets wandered its streets aimlessly, stripped of everything that once made them human...

Yet on this day in particular—

A turning point unfolded that would forever mark the long history of this city.

BOOM!

Explosions and clashes rang out nonstop.

Frey Starlight now stood alone, battling an entire army of puppets led by none other than the former Lord—Val.

Both fighters wielded dual swords, focusing entirely on speed, which turned the clash into utter chaos.

Locked in a swirling storm of blades, not even the other puppets could interfere.

Sparks flew wildly from the repeated collisions of solid metal.

In just a few seconds, Frey and the puppet of the old Lord exchanged a terrifying number of slashes with their swords.

It looked like an evenly matched struggle .. But that couldn't have been further from the truth.

Val's body had taken dozens of dark slashes that pierced through his defenses.

Meanwhile, Frey hadn't been touched even once—

Dodging and parrying every strike from the former Ultras Lord with refined precision.

His body was cloaked in a strange black glow, almost like a living shadow.

Using precise counters, Frey neutralized Val's fighting style and took full control of the battle.

His black swords carved dark trails through the air every time they cut into the thick skin of Val's puppet body, even while fending off attacks from other puppets.

He was fully immersed in the battle thanks to Ascension, giving him overwhelming focus.

Val's puppet couldn't speak, but the fury in his red eyes and the twisted rage on his face showed how much he resented the way the fight was going.

Desperate to shift the momentum, Val's swords lit up with blazing crimson flames—

And without warning, he unleashed a massive beam of fire, vaporizing every building in front of him.

Val continued releasing blast after blast of explosive fire aura, determined to burn Frey alive.

The vengeful puppet cared for nothing else ..

His attacks even incinerated many of the other puppets in his path.

"Is that all you've got? Former Lord of the Ultras?"

From within the inferno—

Frey emerged, cloaked in his dark shadow aura, leaping across rooftops at blinding speed.

"No wonder my father killed you so easily."

Furious at the insult...

Val's puppet launched more flames, trying to chase Frey as he darted around at full speed.

The inferno spread across the battlefield, engulfing half the city and reducing the surrounding puppets to ash.

Gripping his flaming swords again, Val let out a mechanical roar—

A scream of rage—

And in the blink of an eye, the enraged puppet was in front of Frey again.

Their blades clashed in a blazing collision.

Frey with his shadow aura—

Val with searing flames—

They exchanged blows at breakneck speed, sprinting through the battlefield as wildfires raged around them.

The other puppets swarmed in from all directions, their bodies burning and breaking down as they charged, uncaring of their fates.

Yet despite the overwhelming chaos—

Frey dodged and deflected every attack flawlessly, shadow tendrils dancing around him as his dark glow intensified.

Val, however, only grew more furious—

Especially when Frey slashed one of his eyes with Balerion, then followed up with a swift kick that sent him crashing through a building.

At that exact moment ..

The clown puppet and the massive enforcer appeared, aiming to rip Frey apart.

But Frey had seen them coming—

And they struck nothing but the phantom afterimage he left behind.

"Ten Thousand Steps of Shadow: Black Meteor."

With a single slash, a massive wave of black aura erupted—

Reducing both of them to dust.

"That should be enough for the enforcer... and that damn Zombozo."

Descending slowly from the sky, Frey landed, his feet touching the ground as his Hawk Eyes scanned the area for new threats.

And it only took moments—

For those eyes to widen in shock at the number of enemies surrounding him.

From within the flames—

Dozens of clown puppets and giant enforcers emerged, cackling like lunatics as they closed in.

At the same time ..

A nearby building exploded as Val detonated his aura and returned to the battlefield—

His arms now extended into flaming blades of their own.

Frey glanced at the overwhelming number of enemies closing in.

He let out a quiet sigh, his face expressionless—

Until his eyes lit up with violet light once more.

"So be it... Come at me."

As if waiting for that command ..

The clown puppets, their bellies split open into massive maws, charged in alongside the enforcers, who leapt forward with thunder-charged fists.

And leading the charge—

Val, the vengeful Lord who wanted nothing more than to kill Frey.

There, amid the blaze ..

The Puppet City turned into a blood-drenched hellscape ..

But instead of red, it was blue.

Blue from the puppet blood, and the severed limbs that now littered the battlefield.

Surrounded by countless enemies...

Frey's skin began to crack, releasing a violent surge of violet light that blasted every puppet around him away.

"Ignition!!"

Without warning—

Frey detonated his aura, releasing it as a towering pillar of darkness that swallowed the battlefield, obliterating every puppet it touched.

The Ignition caused a quake that shook the entire city..

And even tore open the skies above with the sheer scale of its destructive force.

From afar—

Clana Starlight, still fleeing the city, stopped in her tracks.

Her eyes widened in terror as she gazed at the colossal explosion swallowing a huge portion of the city—

An explosion that left it more devastated than before.

"Frey..."

She whispered his name unconsciously ..



The man who had stayed behind, facing an entire city alone...

Just to protect her.

The blast had engulfed Val ..

But it didn't kill him.

The puppet of the former Lord barely managed to escape the explosion's core, struggling to suppress the dark aura that was corroding his body.

So preoccupied was he with resisting the Ignition's aftermath—

He didn't notice Frey descending from above, his twin swords ablaze with furious violet fire.

"Ten Thousand Steps of Shadow: Infinite Darkness!!"

With a roar, Frey unleashed a beam of dark aura directly into Val's face, launching him backward.

The impact sent Val crashing through buildings, his body grinding against the shattered ground.

As a result—

Val's outer shell was completely torn apart, exposing what lay beneath.

Panting heavily, fatigue finally beginning to set in, Frey felt a deep disgust as he laid eyes on Val's internal structure.

The former Lord's veins looked like tangled wires, his organs a grotesque fusion—

Half human flesh, half translucent sacs pulsing with glowing energy.

The previous attack had destroyed Val's right arm ..

But he replaced it immediately with a two-meter-long blade.

The old Lord of the Ultras let out another scream before launching himself forward again.

Frey met him head-on, and the two collided violently inside a massive crater—

Surrounded by rubble, fire, and unrelenting devastation.

Their afterimages blurred as they clashed, destroying each other with reckless abandon.

Val's burning aura turned the battlefield into a furnace ...

So intense, in fact, that nearby puppets melted under the rising heat.

The inferno drew every breath of oxygen from the air.

Frey had to hold his breath to avoid suffocating in the hellish storm created by the vengeful puppet.

Despite the heat, the exhaustion from Ignition, and the mounting tension—

Frey still held the upper hand.

Shadow adaptation allowed him to deflect every one of Val's attacks flawlessly.

"Ten Thousand Steps of Shadow: Mirage!"

As he activated the Mirage technique, a thousand copies of Frey materialized, surrounding Val in a bewildering illusion.

Val couldn't tell which was real—

And before he could react, all the clones slashed simultaneously, unleashing a torrent of black strikes that engulfed the entire battlefield and tore him apart.

"This... isn't good."

Watching the battle from afar—

Simon Manus smiled, yet beads of sweat formed across his back.

All of this... because of one boy.

"This kid's a real monster..."

Stunned by the overwhelming power Frey displayed at such a young age, Simon Manus finally began to grasp the true danger of the Victoriad's hero that had fallen into their hands.

"If we let him grow unchecked, he might surpass even Abraham Starlight..."

A boy just eighteen years old, yet already fighting on par with Lords and Hollows—

Compared to the sheer potential of that child, Simon realized they were nothing but small fish swimming beside a shark that could devour them at any moment.

"This isn't funny at all... kihihihhi."

Adjusting his hat, Simon turned his attention back to the battle displayed on the screens.

"But I wonder, Frey Starlight... how much longer can you endure?"

Chapter 369: Role reversal (2)

Val had been utterly broken—

Now little more than a raging mechanical zombie, fighting with insane fury.

And yet—

He still delivered deadly force, enough to shock even Frey.

"Even after being completely wrecked... he can still fight like this?"

Busy clashing with the berserk Val—

Frey didn't notice the hands creeping up from beneath him.

When he finally looked down ..

He saw scorched, half-melted puppets crawling toward him, grabbing onto his legs.

That moment of hesitation—

Was enough.

Val's blade pierced Frey's stomach, the tip bursting out through his back.

Seeing the blood spill, the searing pain tearing through him—

Frey cursed under his breath, severing Val's arm with Balerion, then unleashed a dark wave of aura that wiped out the puppet remnants trying to cling to him.

With that brief window, Frey pulled the blade from his body and immediately focused on healing his wound.

But the puppets didn't give him a moment of rest.

They swarmed him again, climbing over one another in desperation.

Frey unleashed even more of his dark aura...

Then surged forward once again, crushing everything in his path.

With terrifying speed, he tore through the remaining puppets, leaving trails of black aura scorched across the ruins.

He succeeded in eradicating every last one ..

And even though his body screamed in protest, he forced himself forward, just in time to meet Val's final charge—

The puppet cloaked in blazing fire.

The moment their blades collided again—

A final explosion of auras tore across the battlefield.

Frey poured the last of his SSS Rank aura into the clash

And after a grueling battle...

Darkness triumphed over fire.

With both swords, Frey pierced Val's chest..

And destroyed him completely.

The former Lord of the Ultras' eyes slowly dimmed as they locked onto Frey—

A boy who bore a face strikingly similar to the one who had once killed him in the distant past.

He had died once as a human...

And now, he was dying again—this time, as a puppet.

But this time, it was different.

Because the moment Frey destroyed him—

Val exploded.

His body shattered completely, and something hidden within him was finally released.

Dozens of razor-sharp blades erupted outward ..

Piercing Frey's body at point-blank range, leaving him no time to escape.

Val's final attack turned Frey into a pincushion ..

His body torn apart, blood gushing in horrifying streams.

Three blades in the stomach, two in the chest, four through the legs, two in the arms—

And one slashed clean through a portion of his neck.

Frey fell from the sky, coughing up blood ..

The victim of Val's final, suicidal strike.

Barely able to move his body, Frey cursed through clenched teeth ..

Only to see that clown emerge from beneath the rubble, laughing maniacally as he waited for him.

Its belly stretched open, transforming into a giant maw.

The clown was preparing to swallow him whole—

And Frey, still pinned by Val's blades, could only struggle in vain to free himself.

But it was too late.

Val's final attack had done its job ..

Frey was immobilized, a perfect prey for the monstrous clown closing in on him.

As the jaws of hell opened before him, Frey stared at that monstrous mouth and wondered—

"Is this the end?"

It was supposed to be...

But then...

A flash of light blinded him.

Bloodshot eyes flew open in shock ..

As Frey saw Clana appear from thin air, shoving him away, her body wrapped in a radiant white aura.

"Clana..."

Everything happened in slow motion ..

Through the lens of Frey's enhanced Hawk Eyes.

Clana's hand glowed with the Witch's Mark, extending toward him as if to pass on one final hope...

The hand that saved him.

Her smile. Her calm black eyes.

The last things he saw—



Before the clown's maw snapped shut, swallowing her whole.

Her hand ..

The one that had pushed Frey to safety—was severed mid-motion.

And blood splattered across Frey's face.

The clown let out a crazed laugh as it devoured her ..

Then looked at Frey with terrifying red eyes before fleeing the battlefield entirely.

Staring at the slender, severed hand lying in front of him—

Frey froze, unable to process what had just happened.

Then ..

His vision turned blood red.

He rose once more, unleashing a monstrous roar from deep within—

Blood still pouring from his mouth.

In a state of pure rage ..

Frey yanked the blades from his body one after another, not caring how much blood gushed out with each pull.

With shattered organs, torn ligaments, and a body on the brink—

Frey ran.

He chased after the clown with maddened desperation.

"Recover... recover... recover... recover—Damn you!!!"

Gasping for breath, his heart pounding violently ...

He tried to keep up with the blood loss, forcing his body to regenerate, bit by bit, through sheer will and aura.

"I'm fine... I'm fine..."

His wounds slowly began to close...

And he leapt forward at blinding speed, his eyes locked on the clown now running ahead.

"Don't you dare, Clana..."

Clutching his swords tightly—

Frey's only thought was to destroy that clown as fast as possible.

"Don't you dare die for me!!!"

Desperation fueled his every step.

"Don't you dare throw your life onto me!!!"

His face darkened ..

As more and more puppets emerged from the same path the clown had taken.

"Simon Manus!!!!"

His vision soaked in crimson rage ...

Frey let out a scream that shook the air.

He hacked through puppet after puppet—

Shredding them, uncaring for his wounds or the state of his broken body.

Frey fought his way forward, chasing after Clana, who had grown more distant with every second.

'I don't care if I die here... in this battlefield. If I die—then I lose nothing.'

Surrounded by countless enemies—

He kept fighting, his soul screaming through every swing.

Frey's eyes never left the clown, even as it began to vanish from sight.

'I don't care about dying... Because if I die, the only thing I lose is myself...'

He had always seen himself as a soul that didn't belong in this world.

And he was fine with leaving it someday.

But ever since his father gave his life so he could live ..

That life had not belonged to him anymore.

"Not you too, Clana..."

He was supposed to be the one protecting her.

Why had he endured all this, fought through hell—

When he could've easily fled?

What reason did he have to fight ..

If not for her?

"Why did you come back!!?"

Why didn't she run—

Just like he told her to?

How the hell did the roles reverse,

And she became the one who saved him?

Why was he now forced to carry the weight of another life—

A weight that shackled his body like chains?

Frey felt his head boiling as he continued tearing through the puppets around him,

Blasting them back with sheer force.

He drained his SSS-Rank Aura without a second thought,

Ignoring his body's screams, which warned him he had reached his absolute limit.

He unleashed more and more waves of catastrophic destruction—

Each one more violent than the last.

And with bloodshot eyes—

Frey kept moving forward.

"I won't let you die."

In a state of merciless fury—

Frey made a vow to the entire Puppet Land:

"Either she lives... or they all die."

## Chapter 370: A Final Farewell (1)

The flames engulfing Puppet City raged on ..

All that remained were ashes and ruins.

Just hours ago, this place had been one of the most beautiful cities in the heart of the corruption known as the Ultras.

Now, it had become a savage inferno, burning without end.

Scattered limbs and shattered puppet parts littered the streets.

Streams of blue blood flowed endlessly.

The clowns kept laughing without pause—

And the puppets kept crawling forward with murderous red eyes.

All of it aimed at one person ..

Frey Starlight, who continued fighting with bloodshot eyes filled with madness.

With each slash that tore through more of them, Frey felt his body slowly breaking apart.

His chest ached violently ..

Forced to breathe in the toxic smoke and gases rising from the fires around him.

His body was pushed into a constant cycle of regeneration—

Because Frey refused to fall.

He refused to stop fighting.

Even though he had become strong enough to maintain Blood Form far longer than ever before ..

This time, he had gone too far.

Surrounded on all sides by burning, frenzied puppets—

They lunged at him, desperate to drag him down into death with them.

He could no longer see the clown that had swallowed Clana.

The creature had long since vanished behind the relentless tide of puppets crawling toward him.

What kind of army is this?

How many puppets did Simon create in this cursed city?

Frey wondered—

But he no longer cared.

All he wanted was to annihilate them all—

And reach her as fast as possible.

After fighting for what felt like an eternity in a battlefield forged from hell ..

His swords had grown unbearably heavy.

Each swing drained the last remaining breath from his lungs.

His body barely responded to the desperate commands his mind gave it.

But he forced it to keep going.

And that will alone—

Made him into something more terrifying than the puppets attacking him.

It was a brutal struggle in every sense of the word.

...

...

...

A human's life is short.

And here, on the land of the Ultras—

It becomes even shorter.

Clana Starlight had lived her entire life as a core member of the prestigious Starlight family.



You could say she did whatever she pleased, using the privileges she was born with to achieve what her peers could not.

But her life had always been... empty.

Colorless.

A dull gray.

Perhaps the only thing that added a hint of color to that hollow existence ...

Was Frey himself.

When Clana Starlight opened her eyes again—

Her vision was red, her blood clouding her sight.

She felt... nothing.

She couldn't see clearly ...

Trapped inside the clown's belly.

She couldn't move a muscle—

In fact, she couldn't feel a single part of her body.

And when she managed to tilt her blood-soaked head ..

She was greeted by the sight of her own mutilated body, Pierced by dozens of iron-like thorny teeth.

No part of her was left untouched.

But she felt no pain—

Which made it clear she was entirely paralyzed.

It wasn't long before another wave of nausea came ..

And her fading consciousness slipped even further.

Her bloody face went dark once again.

Clana knew she wouldn't survive.

She was ready to let everything go.

But the death she had waited for—never came.

Instead, she was left in endless darkness.

And as her sight vanished, a strange melody touched her ears.

Music.

Soft. Mysterious.

It did nothing but heighten her sense of delirium.

She still remembered everything—

How she turned back the moment she saw that massive explosion,

Following a gut feeling she couldn't ignore.

In the end, she had arrived just in time—

Saving Frey, who had won the battle... but lost the war.

She felt sorry for him.

She knew how much he had suffered to protect her.

Ever since they ended up stranded together in this land of death,

Frey had always stood before her—like a shield.

At first, she was happy.

She thought, perhaps, he might return the feelings she had started to harbor for him...

But the more she came to understand the mysterious man named Frey ..

The more she realized the truth ran deeper than that.

Seeing that tortured soul fighting alone,

Unbothered by pain, unafraid of death,

Bleeding every time he moved—

A soul that longed to escape the hell of life and rest in the peace of death...

Clana didn't want him to end that way.

So, she was happy...

That she could be the one to save him in the end.

Between her and Frey ...

She wished for his survival.

She wished he would live—

So that maybe, one day, he could find a shred of happiness in this wretched world.

If he could just have that...

She would be satisfied.

Those were her thoughts,

As she slowly sank into darkness ..

That strange melody still playing beside her ear.

Her consciousness drifted further away,

As she began to hallucinate.

She saw countless things floating around her—

Faces she hadn't seen in a very long time.

All of them stared at her as the music played on...

Among them,

She saw an old man, smiling gently at her .. Tipping his hat as if to greet her.

Clana didn't understand any of it.

Her body, her mind ..

None of it made sense anymore.

The only thing that brought her back to awareness .. Was the shaking of the clown's body ..

As it kept fleeing...

From Frey.

She had wanted to die and end it quickly.

But no matter how long she waited—death never came.

Even with her broken, ruined body...

Unconscious. Drenched in darkness.

Time passed at a terrifying speed, trapping her within that strange, haunting music...

Hours that felt both endlessly long and shockingly short blurred together—

Until her consciousness finally returned to reality.

Slowly...

A faint beam of light pierced through the darkness as the clown's belly convulsed and was torn open by a black sword.

The slash widened into a massive rupture, and the clown collapsed, dead at last, after being struck again and again.

It took her a few moments to fully comprehend what had happened.

With wide, stunned eyes—

Clana stared at Frey, who stood over the clown's corpse, breathing heavily, his face smeared with blood, his body weighed down by wounds.

"Frey..."

She spoke his name unconsciously.

He didn't reply.

He simply reached in and pulled her out of the broken clown whose eternal grin had finally vanished.

Without hesitation, Frey clutched her tightly .

And sprinted away from the battlefield.

When Clana glanced around her, she could only stare in disbelief at the devastated wasteland behind them ..

The battlefield, still burning, flooded with the corpses of countless puppets Frey had slain over hours of relentless fighting.

Somehow—

He had caught up to them with a body already destroyed,

Fought through all those puppets without rest, And reached her—

Pulling her from the belly of the giant clown.

But the cost had been immense.

Frey could barely move.

That he was still conscious at all... was a miracle.

"Frey... I "

"Don't say anything... huff."

Breathing raggedly—

Frey kept his gaze locked forward as he carried her, running toward the burning city's outer edge.

"We're getting out of here."

He spoke with resolve ..

And a strange peace on his face.

A peace born of the fact that he'd finally reached her.

That he had saved her—after everything.

Clana didn't know what to say.

She simply remained silent, letting him carry her forward.

But for some reason...

A strange sense of wrongness crept over her.

When she looked down at her body—



She was shocked to find it completely intact.

No injuries. No blood. No damage.

Even though she clearly remembered waking up inside the clown's belly—

Mangled beyond recognition.

Somehow, her destroyed body had been restored.

As sensation returned to her limbs—

A cold, dark feeling began growing inside her.

Reaching up to touch her throbbing head—

Clana froze when she felt something strange.

Looking closer ..

She realized that it was her hand.

Or rather ..

A mechanical hand.

Perfectly attached to her arm, in place of the one she had lost to the clown.

It felt so real that she hadn't even noticed it ...

Until now.

Staring at the artificial hand ..

The bitter unease inside her grew stronger.

Something was very, very wrong.