

VILLAIN 391

Chapter 391: Frey starlight vs Mergo (1)

Life was never fair.

No matter how hard you tried, no matter how much you sacrificed to reach something ...

In the end, you'd crash against the painful truth, realizing your failure.

Even after defeating an army of over a thousand Ultras, with the ogre Lawrence at their head, Frey now found himself standing before a monster far more terrifying ..

Mergo, the Lord of the Ultras, said to be the strongest among them.

Here, atop a blood-soaked battlefield, surrounded by scattered corpses...

Bodies that had become nothing more than a feast for the crows...

The two stood face to face over a crimson pool, tainted with black.

Frey Starlight vs Mergo.

The Lord of the Ultras had just asked him a question ..

"Who are you?"

Who is this young man who annihilated such overwhelming numbers alone?

What is the secret of the Victoriad's hero, the one who climbed from the bottom to reach what no one else had?

Those questions haunted Mergo as he tried to assess the boy standing before him.

But Frey didn't respond.

He couldn't bring himself to.

His feet, sunken in the pool of blood, made it feel like he stood in a swamp—

Even walking felt like dragging a mountain.

His armor had been discarded long ago, leaving his upper body bare, soaked in blood, There was no part of him left unscathed.

Just standing was a challenge.

His blood-soaked eyes could barely see anymore.

His swords. . once an extension of his body.. felt heavy now.

Each step drained what little strength he had left.

And now, he was facing one of the strongest Lords of the Ultras.

The smell of blood.

The exhaustion.

The dead.

Frey felt it all.

He wanted nothing more than to lie down and close those heavy eyes.

But he couldn't.

Not when those scenes kept flashing in his mind.

He saw Danzo—his friend—bleeding as much, perhaps even more, in some far-off place.

He saw Gvardiol tearing through his friend's body, laughing madly.

That horrific laughter echoed in Frey's mind like a curse.

"I have to go..."

He muttered, forcing himself to move forward.

"Go? Go where?"

"To them... I have to reach them."

"Ah, I see. You're talking about your comrades," Mergo replied.

He scratched his head, his gaze fixed on Frey from the start, trying to decipher the nature of the young man who had caused such a massacre.

With a half-smile, Mergo said something that struck more fear into Frey than anything else.

"Sorry, but you're not going anywhere."

Mergo began walking toward him, stepping over the sea of corpses.

"You're far too dangerous, boy. The mere thought of letting a monster like you go free, letting you grow stronger... it terrifies me."

He laughed, unsheathing his Ushigatana.

"I'm too old for surprises. My bones can't take it anymore."

And just like that, the Lord of the Ultras made it clear—he would not let Frey pass.

But before he could even blink .. Frey charged at him, enveloped in blazing purple aura.

His swords burned with fury.

How could he still move like this? Even in that state?

Mergo briefly wondered.

Frey's blades were aimed directly at his neck.

But the old Lord still wore that same calm smile.

"Well... it doesn't matter."

In the blink of an eye—

A strange wave of aura exploded, spreading in all directions.

Frey had been a heartbeat away from slicing Mergo's neck .. But in the very next moment, the old man was already behind him.

"Even if you were in perfect condition... the outcome wouldn't have changed."

At that instant—

Blood exploded from Frey's arm.

His right hand, along with the Dark Sister, had been severed.

Mergo was too fast.

So fast, Frey hadn't even seen or felt the strike until his hand was gone.

The old Lord had intended to end it quickly.

But what he didn't expect—

Was Frey grabbing his severed hand before it hit the ground and forcing it back into place.

In less than a second, an impossible scene unfolded .. Flesh fused with flesh, and a violet light surged from the wound, reattaching the limb as if it had never been lost.

And as soon as it was restored ..

Black flames ignited from Frey's swords.

A roaring storm of aura erupted from his blades, surging toward Mergo.

The latter blocked it easily .. But his expression shifted to seriousness.

That bloody monster had come at him again, relentless.

His severed hand had returned.

As if nothing had ever happened.

"Interesting," Mergo muttered.

Their blades clashed—Frey's twin swords against the Ushigatana.

Mergo fought without any difficulty, blocking every strike, exchanging rapid blows.

Legendary blades rang out, steel against steel, in a violent rhythm ... Between Frey, who attacked like a madman,

And Mergo, who parried everything with terrifying ease.

"Why do you fight with such ferocity, boy?"

BOOM!

Both moved at blinding speed.

Mergo kept retreating, while Frey chased after him with relentless fury, trying to land a strike .. But no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't touch him.

"Trying to save your friends, is that it?"

BOOM!!

Their swords clashed again and again, the battlefield echoing with the sound of metal.

Frey panted heavily, his breath ragged .. his mind unable to focus anymore.

Against Mergo ...

That strange old man who spoke so casually despite the savage exchange taking place between them.

"You seem to have a noble ambition," Mergo said calmly. "What kind of will drives a man to stand alone against a thousand, just for the sake of others?"

BOOOOM!!

Sparks of fire burst from the grinding steel—Dark Sister and Balerion surged with Frey's power.

But every time, the Ushigatana was there to meet them.

Their hands became weapons of mass destruction, carving through the air, leaving trails of clashing aura behind them.

BOOOM!!!

Again and again, they collided—

Each trying to overpower the other.

Face-to-face.

An old man smiling...

And a blood-soaked youth who looked more monster than man.

"You intend to push through no matter the cost, don't you?" Mergo said.

"You believe that if you give everything—absolutely everything—you might succeed."

Still smiling, Mergo slowly opened his dark eyes, revealing a terrifying glow beneath.

"How naïve you are, Frey Starlight."

SLAASH!!

From out of nowhere, Mergo unleashed dozens of slashes, ripping into Frey's skin and exploding blood in every direction.

But he didn't stop.

He continued the merciless onslaught.

"Do you see yourself as some kind of hero, Frey Starlight?"

With one mighty strike, Mergo sent Frey flying .. Then blinked behind him in an instant and tore through him again.

"You're wrong, boy.

You're nothing but a monster."

SLAASH!!

"A monster like me..."

SLAASH!!!

Drenched in his own blood, Frey was completely overpowered.

"Tell me—how can a monster who slaughtered a thousand people so easily...

Even think about saving others?"

The corpses were still scattered around them .. Rotting, desecrated, consumed by crows and decay.

"You think we're just animals, don't you?

Creatures waiting to be butchered by your sword, Frey Starlight?"

With brutal speed, Mergo struck Frey down to the ground and stomped on his chest with crushing force.

Lying beneath his boot, Frey's body was torn apart, deep wounds carved into him from head to toe.

He glared up with bloodshot eyes—

As Mergo leaned in, pressing down harder.

"Just like you have something to fight for...

Each one of them did too."

The corpses littering the field weren't savage Ultras.

They were soldiers of the Highblood—men who had lived with honor and kindness.

"You think you have the right to judge them?

To kill them so you can save your friends?

Absurd."

Mergo ground his heel harder into Frey's chest.

"Look at them, Frey Starlight!!

You killed them!

You killed them all!!"

His voice boomed with rage as he pressed down.

"Each of them had a story waiting to be told .. And you severed their threads before they could even begin."

"Whether blessed or damned...

They died with dreams still clinging to their bones."

"How many children will grow up without their fathers because of you?"

"How many men striving for success had that very dream ripped from them?"

"Some were basking in the warmth of family...

And you ended it.

Some were learning to embrace solitude...

And you erased their existence."

"You killed them with your own hands, Frey Starlight.

So what kind of selfish arrogance makes you believe you're worthy... To even think about saving anyone else?"

Mergo grabbed the hilt of his Ushigatana—

And drove it into Frey's chest.

"You and I... we're monsters."

He pulled it out .. Then stabbed him again.

"Monsters made to kill. We live to slaughter and spill blood."

He continued stabbing him—

His expression twisted and terrifying as he looked down on the bloody mess that was Frey.

"Our only purpose in this world is destruction. Until the day we die and receive our punishment.

That is the meaning of our existence.

There's no real difference between us."

Having torn Frey apart, his blood flooding the ground—

Mergo finally stepped back, a sharp look in his eyes.

"This...

This is the world we live in, Frey Starlight."

Chapter 392: Frey starlight vs Mergo (2)

He turned away from the boy he had butchered without mercy, exhaling in frustration.

"I went too far... I shouldn't have lost control like that."

After burying his opponent beneath an avalanche of brutality,

Mergo forced himself to move on, his attention shifting to the other corpses around him.

He just couldn't comprehend it—

A monster who had slaughtered a thousand men talking about saving anyone?

That...

That was what truly made him snap.

"Now then... where did that beast sever Lawrence's head?"

Mergo stepped deeper into the sea of blood, one step at a time, searching for his subordinate.

"That boy possesses the highest purity among us all—and regeneration that rivals even the strongest demons. He'll survive... even if only a fragment of him remains."

Lawrence was nothing more than a fifteen-year-old child, with barely any experience.

He was more like a beast that fought purely on instinct ... And that instinct, despite his raw power, wasn't enough.

Mergo had no intention of letting him die so easily.

Unbothered, he kept searching...

Until suddenly—he froze. His eyes widened.

Of course they did .. after all ... he felt him standing behind him.

Slowly, Mergo turned around.

There stood Frey Starlight, swords in hand, bloodshot eyes cold as death.

"...What is the meaning of this?"

Mergo was certain he had killed him.

He had pierced his heart several times—yet here he was.

Standing again.

Then, without warning, Frey lunged forward, resuming the battle.

Both surged at one another, their speed so fast it resembled teleportation.

A flurry of strikes echoed across the bloodstained land.

Mergo couldn't understand it ...

Most of Frey's wounds had already healed.

"What are you...?"

Frey attacked faster than before, relentlessly, trying to land a fatal blow.

But Mergo was still far quicker.

He bent space around him, teleporting freely—effortlessly avoiding everything—

And appeared behind Frey with a smile.

"crevice."

SLAASH!!!

In less than a second, more than a hundred cutting marks exploded across Frey's body .. A brutal technique using the Ushigatana's unique spatial mastery.

Blood gushed out violently.

Then ..

The wounds caught fire in a dark violet glow...

And healed.

Mergo's eyes twitched in disbelief.

Frey dashed toward him again, and their chaotic speed duel resumed.

Both had become blurs—too fast to follow.

Slashing and countering .

The battlefield became their canvas of destruction.

Mergo continued tearing Frey apart ..

"Sever!"

SLAASH!!

His swordsmanship was nothing short of monstrous.

In less than a second, Frey's body was once again covered in hundreds of cuts.

But then—again—

A strange sound. A rustling. A shadow swept through Frey's body ..

And just like that ..

Those wounds began to heal once more, cloaked in the same dark violet glow.

"Hahaha! Are you some kind of zombie?!"

They clashed again.

And again.

But then—Mergo noticed something.

"...He's getting faster?"

With each passing second .. Frey's speed increased.

"Crevice!!"

Mergo unleashed hundreds of slashes in an instant.

That was the power of the Ushigatana:

A sword that could attack from every direction with invisible cuts in the blink of an eye.

It was the same attack that had destroyed Frey's body again and again.

But this time...

Something changed.

Just before the slashes could connect—

A dark aura erupted from Frey, and he moved.

Weaving through them with an unnatural precision .. Dodging invisible attacks that no one should be able to see.

Somehow...

Frey avoided the unavoidable.

Mergo laughed madly.

"You can see them, Frey Starlight!!"

His hand moved with blinding speed, unleashing another flurry of attacks.

"You can see my sword!!"

This time, Mergo went all out—unleashing his full power.

With a single swing, he released 100 invisible crescent blades.

Then with a second—200 more.

Then a third.

Then a fourth.

And a fifth.

By the tenth swing .. thousands of slashes rained down like a storm, covering the entire battlefield.

The corpses, the ground, the mountains, even the air itself—

Everything was torn apart.

And especially...

Frey Starlight.

Though he managed to dodge some ..

The sheer volume of slashes was too overwhelming.

His body was shredded.

Torn to pieces like meat on a butcher's slab ..

Mergo's invisible blades showed no mercy.

Then—less than a second later—

That same dark aura ignited again, wrapping around Frey's mangled form...

And healing him.

He stood again.

Mergo narrowed his eyes.

"Again... that strange power..."

Mergo spoke in confusion, watching the young man whose regeneration now mirrored that of Lawrence.

And once again.. The battle resumed.

Mergo unleashed another barrage of cutting attacks, but Frey began dodging them with increasing efficiency and greater speed.

"He's seeing my attacks... and adapting to them .. every single time."

As their clash continued, a realization dawned on Mergo.

"He's... adjusting to them."

That strange dark glow—

That combat style unlike anything he'd ever seen before...

Mergo now understood that his opponent was anything but ordinary.

[Shadow Adaptation: 3/7]

Against a monster like Mergo, ranked SS+ .. The true power of the Shadow Adaptation was finally beginning to show.

A terrifying ability that made Frey resistant to nearly everything his enemies threw at him .. And when paired with his uncanny regeneration, it created a force Mergo could no longer dismiss.

Frey had become a question mark.

An anomaly Mergo had so far handled with ease .. Yet now, Frey's speed and strength had grown at such an alarming rate that reaching Mergo was no longer a matter of if, but when.

"This can't be happening..."

An eighteen-year-old boy ..

Wielding two blazing swords imbued with strange powers.

Looked more terrifying than the demons Mergo had once faced.

It defied reason.

Frey had shattered every limit, far surpassing what should be possible.

Their blades continued clashing amid a battlefield consumed by flames. The devastation from their collisions scarred the very land.

Then their eyes met ..

And in that moment, Mergo saw something he had failed to notice before.

Frey Starlight's eyes ..

His body's movements, his aura, his abilities...

He was too perfect.

A cold, expressionless face.

Eyes devoid of light.

Not a word spoken since the fight began.

He didn't seem like a boy fighting for his friends anymore.

He seemed like a killing machine.

An automaton.

Not the same human who had once fought with conviction and emotion ..

But something else entirely.

Their auras exploded again as they pushed against each other, and Mergo laughed out loud.

"You... what are you?"

Was he still fighting Frey Starlight?

Or had that cold sword... become something entirely different?

Frey didn't answer.

He just kept fighting—harder than before.

Regenerating again and again.

That dark violet light overtaking his face.

His silence was louder than words.

Mergo had been right all along ..

That boy wasn't human anymore.

He was a monster.

A true monster who had finally found his way to this battlefield.

After all, it was impossible for someone who had just fought a thousand men ..

To then fight like this with such power—

Such cold fury.

"What the hell are you?! Frey Starlight!!"

Mergo roared, launching himself forward with full strength, unleashing everything he had.

The battle erupted into an entirely new realm of destruction.

The mangled corpses around them were desecrated even further—collateral damage from a fight between beasts.

Mergo vs. Frey Starlight.

A terrifying clash between a young man and an old warrior .. Both wielding blades for similar reasons ..

But standing on opposite sides of a world that had forced them to fight.

This was the peak of the elite class's struggle ..

And a brutal reminder...

That their suffering was far from over.

Chapter 393: The Peak of the Witch's Game

The final round of the Witch's Game had reached its peak.

Devastating battles erupted across the land, leaving behind trails of destruction and bloodshed .. blood of both the invading Elite Class and the native Ultras.

But among all the chaos, one battle stood above the rest in brutality and power:

Frey Starlight vs Mergo.

Their battlefield was none other than the sea of corpses Frey had carved through not long ago.

A frantic, chaotic clash—so fast-paced that it resembled teleportation.

Two monsters locked in a death match, each trying to tear the other apart.

Somehow, Frey managed to survive.

Not only that—he held his ground against one of the strongest warriors the Ultras had to offer.

Mergo.

But this fight... it was unlike anything that had come before.

Frey's powers, his speed, his technique—everything was different.

With cold, empty eyes and an emotionless face,

The young man had become a living weapon.

A machine of death clashing head-on with the mightiest Ultras Lord.

In that moment... Frey could no longer understand anything.

"My body... feels so heavy."

In the depths of his fading consciousness, Frey felt himself sinking into a thick, black swamp.

A sea of darkness slowly consuming his soul.

In that place, his mind was blank, paralyzed .. Unable to move, as if drugged into submission.

Drunk on fatigue and grief, Frey couldn't remember a thing.

It felt like a dream.

A nightmare he had been forced to live through until now.

And the nightmare wasn't over.

Even in that state, the third-person perspective of the system allowed him to glimpse what his friends were enduring.

And his eyes, more than anyone, settled on Danzo.

His comrade.

A fighter who had given more to this life than anyone else.

The man who stood by his side without ever expecting anything in return.

Someone Frey had called a true friend...

Now dying slowly .. tortured by Gvardiol.

"I have to keep fighting..."

Frey's lips moved with effort.

His body was shattered, bloodied, exhausted.

He had already given everything ..

Fought with every last drop of strength.

There wasn't a single part of him left unscathed.

But life was cruel.

Mergo was too strong for him to face in such a condition.

He had fought.

And lost.

He knew this.

But he refused to give in.

"I have to stand... again."

He didn't want to watch it anymore.

Had suffered enough.

He didn't want to live while others died right before his eyes.

He knew he wouldn't be allowed to die—

Those above wouldn't permit it.

He was still needed ..

A crucial piece in a plan far greater than his understanding.

And that was the most terrifying part.

Unable to die,

Forced to live on, Frey found himself watching as he slowly lost himself, again and again.

The trauma he endured...

It was pushing him further and further.

Slowly but surely...

Frey Starlight was becoming the monster everyone had feared.

"I don't want this..."

To live and watch himself transform into a soulless beast...

A killing machine born for a purpose he never chose.

Frey didn't want that to happen.

He tried to rise again.

To fight harder.

With more power.

With more rage.

To give everything he had left ..

To reach them..

To save them.

He tried to defy fate.

To resist its pull with everything he had.

But reality was cruel.

And slowly, Frey's consciousness drifted into darkness.

As if dozens of shadowy threads wrapped around him, Binding him in place ..

He realized he had lost.

But the truth was far different from what he believed in those final moments.

Even as his mind fell into dreams—

His body stood.

Still fighting.

With more rage.

More power.

More speed.

Just as he had wanted.

That body kept fighting until the very end ..

For the dream its owner couldn't realize.

And Frey never knew...

That he had already become the monster.

Frey Starlight vs Mergo.

No doubt—This was the hardest battle yet.

...

...

...

Each member of the Elite Class had their own struggles...

Their own battles to survive ever since they were swallowed by the red gate.

Scattered and isolated, every one of them found themselves forced to fight for their lives.

Among them...

A high-speed battle broke out in a remote mountainous region, far from the others.

Daemon Valerion, clad in his golden dragon armor, charged forward at blinding speed.

Two men pursued him relentlessly ...

Twin brothers, identical in face and form, each wielding a curved blade.

They struck again and again with terrifying precision, their swords humming with deadly intent.

Daemon found himself facing two of the Ultras' elite... both easily A+ rank fighters.

Their technique far outclassed his.

But his Golden Dragon Armor amplified his physical abilities to the point of becoming a one-man force of destruction.

Even so, the coordination between the twins was unnerving.

Daemon could barely hold them off.

"Resistance is pointless, boy," one of them sneered.

"You can't take both of us at once."

With blades cloaked in slicing wind auras,

The twins shredded everything around them, trying to corner Daemon.

But surrounded from both sides, Daemon held his ground.

Black lightning surged through his fists as he parried with his bare hands.

Their attacks rained down with such speed that the armor began to crack and scar ..

Yet Daemon remained calm.

"You're only strong... when you're together."

With a roar and a flash of rage, Daemon slammed the ground beneath him.

"Let's see what happens when I tear you apart!"

Lightning Formation: Wrath of the Lion!

A massive lion made of dark lightning erupted from his aura—

Its roar shattered the air, the explosion launching the twins in opposite directions.

In that moment, Daemon flashed toward one of them.

The twin tried to react .. But Daemon was faster. Much faster.

"Twin Dragon Gate!"

A furious dragon head in one hand ..

A mocking one in the other.

Both constructed of seething black lightning, They clamped down on the twin with brutal force, detonating upon impact.

The man screamed, confident he could withstand the attack.

But Daemon's dragons tore through his body like wet paper, Shattering his dual swords.

"Even with the resilience of an A+ rank fighter... he did this to me with one strike?!"

Staggered and bleeding,

The man stared in disbelief at the golden warrior approaching with a crackling fist.

"Did you think being A+ rank made you untouchable?"

Daemon's punch drove through his chest like a bolt of divine punishment ..

His heart burst open, blood pouring from his mouth as he collapsed.

"You're nothing but worthless trash!"

With one blow, Daemon killed him.

"NO!!"

The second twin lunged in a frenzy, fury blazing in his eyes after seeing his brother fall.

But Daemon didn't flinch.

He met him head-on with more black lightning surging through his body.

"Are you angry that your whore of a brother died by my hand?"

BOOM!

Their exchange wasn't even close.

Daemon's fists overwhelmed his opponent.

"He's exactly where he belongs."

Breaking both of his swords,

Daemon pummeled the twin into the ground with fists of thunder.

A living punching bag, The man could only scream and cough blood under the relentless onslaught.

"The only place fit for Ultras... is hell!"

Daemon spat as he battered him senseless.

"Filth like you shouldn't walk this earth. You belong buried beneath it!"

"You're nothing but filthy beasts—mistakes that should've never been born!"

"The only fate you deserve... is death by these hands!"

He gathered power into his right fist ...

Then unleashed a rocket punch that exploded the man's skull into a mess of flesh and blood.

Blood splattered across Daemon's face,

And the corpse dropped limp at his feet.

He spat on it in disgust.

"So this is what those bastards were planning..."

Luring them into a trap.

Killing them off one by one.

But they made one fatal mistake...

They underestimated Daemon.

He rolled up his left sleeve, revealing Selena's sigil glowing faintly on his arm.

"Time to find the others."

The moment he activated it,

Daemon felt the presence of many of his companions nearby ..

Targeting the closest one without hesitation.

Daemon Valerion charged forward in a surge of dark aura, ready to keep fighting ..

To spill the blood of the scum who dared drag him into such a trap.

He had already claimed victory in his battle .. And with it, earned the right to become a free player.

Chapter 394: The Last Survivor

Many forces decide the fate of mankind in this world.

Among them, power is the most obvious ..

For the strong always have the highest chance of survival, no matter where they are.

In a ruthless world governed by the law of the jungle, Strength alone often separates life from death.

But sometimes...

Other forces intervene from nowhere.

One such force—acknowledged by some, denied by others—

Is luck.

Time and time again, the weak survive not through strength, but by sheer chance ..

Lucky enough to escape the worst outcomes by a hair's breadth.

But luck alone is rarely enough.

Life always finds ways to corner its prey with the most unexpected misfortunes.

And that theory was about to be tested—

When the red gate swallowed the luckiest man alive...

Dawn Polaris was flung into a battlefield prepared especially for him.

As the wielder of the [Last Survivor] ability stood up again and scanned his surroundings ...

He realized he had landed somewhere completely different from before.

With crimson eyes, he swept the terrain ..

And spotted the opponent that had been assigned to him.

They locked eyes for a moment before Dawn asked:

"Who are you?"

She was a woman.

A girl around his age, clad in a light black armor and elegant leather attire—

A pair of black gloves on her hands and a small cap atop her pale head.

Her hair was white.

Her eyes a deeper, more crimson red than even Dawn's.

Her face so pale, it was as if she might die at any second.

With a thin blade in hand, she placed her right hand gently over her chest and bowed with grace.

"My name is Maria. Empyrean to a former Lord. Known as Madam A."

Unsheathing her sword, she calmly stepped forward.

"I'm sorry, but I have to kill you."

Without warning, she vanished ..

Appearing right in front of him.

Dawn instinctively unsheathed his sword and ignited its edge with fire.

And without hesitation...

The two began to duel.

Their swordplay was masterful.

"empyrean... That's a pretty high rank among the Ultras, if I'm not mistaken."

Dawn spoke as he attacked with blazing aura, Pressuring Maria with skilled and aggressive strikes — Which she deflected easily, without using any aura at all.

"Empyrean are candidates meant to become Lords one day.

So yes, you could say it's a respectable position."

There were only four known holders of the "empyrean" title:

V, under Lord Gavid Lindman.

Gvardiole, under Lord Godfrey.

Lawrence, under Lord Myrgo.

And finally... Maria, under the late Lord killed by Maekar—Madam A.

Realizing that his opponent was an important figure to the enemy,

Dawn unleashed a barrage of ruthless attacks, aiming to slash her throat.

Their swords clashed with violent force ..

Dawn pressed harder and harder.

Dozens of exchanges passed...

But despite all the pressure he exerted ..

Dawn suddenly realized his body was riddled with injuries.

"What the...?"

He only understood what was happening when their swords clashed again.

Maria was still untouched— Not a single scratch on her body.

Her sword looked delicate, but it felt heavy as stone against him.

And when he looked closely ..

His expression froze.

"You're not using any aura?!"

"Ah, you noticed..."

With a flick of her wrist,

Maria flung Dawn backward using only physical strength.

He slammed into a wall with enough force to feel his bones shift.

Maria approached him slowly, her face cold and emotionless.

The thin blade in her hand now looked more like a reaper's scythe in Dawn's eyes.

What angered him most ..

Was the fact that his opponent was simply better than him.

Skilled beyond measure.

Physically stronger than he was.

And she had defeated him ... Without even using aura.

As she stood before him, Dawn tried to leap up again ..

But froze in place the moment Maria moved her free hand in a strange, flowing motion.

The moment she did ..

A mysterious force bound him in midair.

He couldn't move an inch.

Raising her arms slowly, Dawn was lifted up alongside them ..

As if invisible strings were pulling him from within.

"You are no match for me."

Maria spoke those words with a tone that might've sounded condescending ..

Yet in a situation like this, her calmness was nothing out of place.

There was no contempt in her voice, no arrogance toward her opponent.

She was simply stating the truth.

empyrean Maria..

A terrifying combatant often ranked alongside the Masked V, the Ultras' so-called "Hero."

In fact, V had always been weaker than her...

Until recently, when he formed a contract with one of the strongest demons.

With swordsmanship far beyond Dawn's,

A physical prowess that betrayed her fragile appearance, And strange abilities he couldn't comprehend
..

Maria was, without a doubt, one of the most dangerous talents the enemy side possessed.

Realizing this, Dawn let out a bitter laugh.

"Damn monster..."

That insult finally broke through her still expression.

Maria narrowed her crimson eyes—

The first shift in her gaze since the battle began.

"A monster, huh?"

Is that what I look like to you?"

If we were to speak of appearances,

That label couldn't be further from the truth.

With her elegant armor and noble demeanor, Maria looked more like a refined noblewoman from a bygone era—

An image of delicate beauty.

But her abilities...

Were anything but beautiful.

They were savage—monstrous even.

"You're all just beasts wearing human skin," Dawn spat with rage,

Even though he couldn't move, his body still frozen by her power.

"You filthy creatures are a disgrace to humanity!"

He recalled the Lower Blood .. Savage beasts in human form.

And the Upper Blood ..

Who never ceased to hunt them down like animals.

Dawn's hatred toward Maria was unfiltered.

His disgust, plain on his face.

"I see..."

Maria nodded, expressionless as ever.

Yet somehow, her empty gaze seemed almost... melancholic.

That look ignited even more fury within Dawn's heart.

"Just kill me already," he growled,

"I don't want to waste another second staring at something so vile."

He knew he had lost.

He was powerless.

And so, he no longer cared.

Maria slowly lowered him to the ground, until he was back in front of her.

Standing there, she gently brought her blade to his neck.

"As you wish.

I'll grant you the death you asked for."

She was just about to swing.

A swift, clean beheading.

No pain.

No cruelty.

But in that very moment ..

Time itself froze.

A violent crash shattered the silence...

As a bolt of howling black lightning struck the earth directly above her.

Maria leapt back instinctively ..

Blocking the attack at the last second.

Dawn dropped to the ground—free once again.

"What the hell are you doing, Dawn Polaris?!"

The voice thundered with fury.

Daemon Valerion had entered the battlefield .. Cloaked in dark lightning and clad in the Golden Dragon Armor.

"You can't even handle one damned whore, you useless bastard?!"

Charging forward with a roar of thunder,

He launched himself straight at Maria—

His black lightning-infused fist crashing toward her face.

But she deflected it.

Effortlessly.

Their attacks collided .. Neither giving ground.

Their strength was perfectly matched.

A frail girl... Holding her own against a juggernaut wearing divine armor.

Realizing this, Daemon Valerion's expression turned deadly serious.

This was no ordinary opponent.

This was—

Empyrean Maria.

Chapter 395: Maria (1)

After the first clash between them,

Daemon Valerion and Maria both stepped back, facing each other again.

They locked eyes, silently gauging each other's strength.

The explosive power radiating from Daemon was impossible to miss ...

Especially with the Golden Dragon Armor amplifying it several times over.

There was no doubt .. he was one of the strongest elite students.

Maria could see that clearly, especially through the ominous black lightning coursing through him.

She saw it .. But Daemon didn't.

No matter how hard he focused on the pale-skinned girl before him, Channeling all his senses to assess her strength...

He felt nothing.

Absolutely nothing.

It was as if she were a normal human—

No aura, no pressure, no signs of power.

Yet she had blocked him so easily just moments ago.

Taking a deep breath,

Daemon returned to his stance, eyes narrowing.

"Let's see what you've really got!"

He stomped the ground with force,

Then shot forward in a flash of black lightning.

The distance between them vanished in an instant .. He hurled a punch at her with everything he had.

But just before his fist could connect,

Maria tilted her body at an impossible angle, dodging at the last second.

Daemon didn't stop.

He unleashed a flurry of punches—so fast that streaks of dark aura trailed behind him like cracks in the air.

Each blow tore the earth apart,

But none of them landed.

Maria weaved between his strikes with flawless agility, Dodging each one by mere hairsbreadths.

"That level of agility... how the hell .."

After slipping past all his attacks,

Maria countered with a razor-fast horizontal slash aimed at Daemon's right flank.

He blocked it with his armored right hand,

But the impact felt like being hit by a speeding truck.

Even though he endured it, The raw physical force coming from that fragile-looking body made no sense.

Still, Daemon wasn't one to fall behind.

Clutching her sword with his right hand and locking it in place, He raised his left hand, gathering a monstrous amount of aura ..

Until the snarling head of a dragon formed over his fist.

The furious beast opened its maw toward Maria, ready to devour her with a devastating blast.

But with her blade restrained,

Maria responded with a simple punch from her free hand .. straight toward the dragon's face.

Unlike Daemon's flashy, aura-infused technique, Her punch held no aura—just raw, pure strength.

Ordinarily, a bare hand should have been obliterated on contact.

But it wasn't.

The moment their powers collided,

A massive shockwave exploded across the battlefield.

From afar, Dawn watched in disbelief—

That girl's punch had stopped Daemon Valerion's full-force attack.

There they stood—fist against fist—

At the center of a crater of destruction.

Neither could overpower the other.

But Maria moved first ..

Delivering a sudden downward kick aimed at Daemon's face.

He narrowly avoided it thanks to his lightning-fast reflexes, But in doing so, he released her sword.

In a blink, Maria slashed at him—aiming for his head.

Daemon, undeterred, twisted and countered with a punch, Redirecting the blade so it slammed into the ground beside him instead.

They both leapt back—only to charge in again at full speed, Determined to end this fight.

Maria's strikes were brutal, But Daemon endured them all .. his black lightning flaring brighter and fiercer with each blow.

"I could do this all day!"

With a thunderous roar, Daemon unleashed even more lightning aura ..

Gaining a slight edge as Maria was finally forced onto the defensive.

Since his defeat in the Victoriad at the hands of Frey Starlight, Daemon had come to a painful realization ...

His biggest weakness was stamina.

He couldn't maintain black lightning for long, As it rapidly drained his body.

But after that fight, The proud lion of House Valerion trained relentlessly,

Pushing his endurance to insane levels.

With the help of the Golden Dragon Armor,

He was able to absorb aura more efficiently .. And drastically extend the time he could sustain black lightning.

The result?

He had become a much stronger warrior than ever before.

"I don't know what kind of Monster you and that weird body of yours are—"

He pressed harder,

While Maria focused solely on defense.

"But you're not winning this!!"

After a barrage of rapid-fire punches ..

For just a moment, Daemon broke through.

A devastating blow smashed into Maria's abdomen ... And the black lightning detonated inside her body.

She was launched backward, Rolling violently across the ground until she crashed into a wall, reducing it to rubble.

The sheer force behind Daemon's punch could have torn through steel.

Step by step, Clad in the power of the Golden Dragon, Daemon walked toward her ..

The black lightning crackling louder and fiercer with every second.

He had truly intended to kill her.

Maria, on the other hand, was lying on the ground, her black hat covering her face.

To any onlooker, she would've seemed utterly defeated.

Even Daemon himself believed it—his last attack had hit her with full force.

Yet, Maria didn't show any sign of distress.

She spoke indifferently as she slowly rose to her feet.

"Oh... 'monster'... what a fitting word."

Gripping her slender sword, she stared at Daemon ..

Her crimson eyes growing deeper in color with every passing second.

"Monsters are cruel and savage... and they can be incredibly dangerous. So be careful when you're dealing with one."

Then—without warning—

And under the watchful gazes of both Daemon and Dawn...

Maria violently drove her blade into the palm of her own right hand.

A thin stream of blood began trickling from the wound, Dripping onto the sword's edge and spiraling around it in a magical dance.

Daemon immediately shifted into a serious stance.

And how could he not?

For the first time since the battle began, he finally felt her aura.

"I thought she was relying solely on physical strength..."

He realized now that he was mistaken.

The overwhelming surge of aura coming from her made that very clear.

"Appearances can be deceiving... and the truth far more terrifying than you imagine."

With chilling composure, Maria swung her sword, unleashing a massive crimson arc straight at Daemon.

The attack moved so fast that Daemon barely had time to raise his shield.

But the moment it struck, A wave of searing pain tore through him—his golden armor denting and cracking on impact.

One strike.

That was all it took to damage his near-indestructible armor.

Daemon clenched his jaw.

He had clearly underestimated her.

Focusing his aura into the armor, The cracks and dents began to mend ...

A trait of the Golden Dragon Armor, modeled after the Emperor's own Fume Knight Armor.

It possessed partial regeneration abilities—making it a devastating relic of war.

Reigniting his aura, Daemon launched himself at Maria again.

"I'll kill you with these hands!!"

His attacks came with explosive force...

But as he charged, Maria countered with another terrifying stab, releasing a blood beam like a bullet straight through the air.

Daemon dodged—barely.

Only to find Maria right in front of him.

"We both want each other dead... so let's end this quickly."

She spoke with the same cold tone.

Daemon roared in reply ..

"Then come at me!!"

Their speed skyrocketed.

Fists and sword clashed dozens of times in the blink of an eye.

But this time... there was something different.

Maria's strikes now carried blood-infused aura unlike anything Daemon had seen before.

Her crimson aura intertwined with his black lightning ...

Sometimes even overpowering it.

Daemon gritted his teeth.

'Where the hell was all this blood coming from?'

He pushed himself further, Forcing his body past its limits just to bring down the girl in front of him.

But Maria was unrelenting ..

With a body of steel, movements of silk, and an aura of death.

She was practically untouchable.

Yet none of it mattered to Daemon.

"I'd rather die than lose to a damn demon-worshipping freak!!"

With a furious scream, Dragon heads formed once again over both his fists,

Ready to strike ..

But Maria met him head-on, Her blade now surrounded by even more crimson aura.

For the first time, emotion flickered across her pale face.

"I was born in blood...

Lived in blood...

Killed in blood...

And I continue still."

Slash!!

With a precise strike, Maria carved another deep fissure into Daemon's armor.

"Just as you were born into the Empire and lived a life of honor .. I was born among the Ultras, and lived my entire life in blood.

What makes you think, even for a moment, that you're fit to judge me?"

Her sword gleamed blood-red, But was caught mid-swing by Daemon's darkened fist.

"Spare me the nonsense!"

With explosive force, Daemon's aura transformed into the massive maw of a lion..

Roaring in Maria's face.

"You made your choice .. the whole filthy lot of you.

You chose this cursed life, so don't come crying now, after everything your hands have done!!"

His black lightning flared...

But crimson tendrils of blood wrapped around it, Maria parrying the blast with ease.

"And what 'choice' are you talking about, exactly?"

The one our ancestors made centuries ago?"

BOOM!

Sword and fist collided once more, Shaking the battlefield.

Daemon howled:

"No .. your choice!!

What's happening now is proof enough!"

Though the betrayal that sparked this war began generations ago, The current Ultras had committed their own horrors ..

The recent abductions... the Witch's Game... all undeniable.

But for the first time since the battle began,

Maria... laughed.

Chapter 396: Maria (2)

She actually laughed—at Daemon's reasoning.

With blood-soaked strikes launched at terrifying speed, she overwhelmed him with ruthless precision.

"I was born and orphaned in the war against the Empire seventeen years ago. Demon's blood was injected into my body at age six. And by ten, I had already become a contracted Highblood."

The humans of the Ultras Continent were nothing more than test subjects to the demons.

Every single one of them had been forcibly injected with demonic blood—no exceptions.

Most of those who underwent the procedure turned into mindless beasts, living like animals. They were known as the Lesser Blood.

But those who survived the injection and adapted to the demonic blood...

They were the Greater Blood ... humans who lived their lives like anyone else.

The contract and the blood bound them eternally, making any act of rebellion against their demon master nearly impossible.

"What choice are you even talking about?"

BOOM!

Maria unleashed an even more explosive surge of power .. Her blade faster, sharper, deadlier.

"From the very beginning, it took the Empire only minutes to declare us guilty.

Tainted.

Doomed to die.

They cast us aside and branded us monsters.

Not even human anymore—just the same as the demons."

Between humans born in the Empire and others born among the Ultras ...

The difference wasn't in species, but in blood...

And that made all the difference.

"I told you to stop spouting that nonsense!!"

Daemon roared, pressing forward with full force, ignoring the cracks spreading across his golden armor
..

Trying to breach Maria's unrelenting defense.

"You had your chances! And you threw them all away!

The gates were sealed years ago! No demons can reach this place anymore ..

So why do you keep raising your swords against us?

You're nothing but lying degenerates!"

And in the face of that outburst...

Maria laughed.

For the second time.

"The gates were sealed...?"

Is that what you really believe, Empire warrior?"

BOOOM!!

Her aura exploded like never before as she stabbed her own elbow ..

Unleashing a greater torrent of blood than ever before.

Her power surged.

"You fool.

If you think for even a moment that a flimsy human seal could keep demons away forever...

Then you've truly been living in a dream."

The world was vast .. far beyond what Daemon could imagine.

And Maria made that clear.

"Wake up.

There's no such thing as safety."

She declared it outright ..

The gates were already open.

Daemon's eyes narrowed in disbelief.

But Maria didn't care.

"Don't misunderstand, Empire warrior.

We don't need your pity.

We don't want your help.

We chose to fight this war on our own terms a long time ago."

Her attacks accelerated—again—

Strike after strike crashing into the Golden Dragon Armor, piling up visible damage.

"But don't think for a second that you and your kind have any right to judge us.

Our fate is our own.

We lived in blood—and we'll continue to live that way."

With those words, Maria unleashed a crimson cocoon that completely surrounded Daemon.

Though he managed to block it using his explosive lightning aura,

Her strikes were too fast—too precise.

She had him cornered.

Daemon fought back for as long as he could ... But eventually, he reached his limit.

He realized it the moment a sharp pain ripped through him ..

His right leg.

With a blood-soaked slash, Maria severed Daemon's leg .. Her relentless strikes having focused with cunning precision on one single point.

The loss threw him off balance.

He crashed to the ground—

And before he could react, Maria stood over him, her blade against his throat.

"This is the end."

She said it plainly.

Daemon stared up at the sword looming above him, Its edge growing before his eyes.

In that moment, for the first time ..

He understood he might actually die.

"I WON'T LOSE!!"

With a monstrous scream, Daemon's lightning aura burst violently outward, flinging Maria away.

He rose—on one leg—and with a desperate swing, unleashed a devastating punch.

"Dragon Gate: Lightning Phantom!"

A blazing beam of destruction shot forth from his fist, Crashing into Maria and launching her through a wall, While his lightning roared behind, trying to incinerate her completely.

Maria endured the suicidal attack with difficulty.

When the dust settled, she stood again, staring at the blood-drenched man before her .. Still upright, still defiant, still bleeding from his severed leg.

"HAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!"

With another thunderous scream,

Daemon funneled every ounce of strength into his armor—responding to his will.

The armor pulsed.

Then ...

A golden prosthetic leg formed over his missing limb, shaped entirely from the Fume Knight armor.

Daemon stood tall again—on two legs.

"I don't care about your damned logic.

Or your hollow words."

Panting heavily, He forced the lightning from his body again.

"All I know is this—

I will kill you here, no matter the cost."

His resolve was terrifying.

Even half-dead, Daemon Valerion stood ready to fight again.

But Maria wasn't moved.

Because she too had something unshakable within her.

"The same goes for me.

I told you from the beginning—

I have to kill you.

And that's exactly what I'll do."

Raising her right palm,

She aimed it straight at Daemon—ready for the next round.

The moment Daemon was about to strike ..

He suddenly froze.

Or rather...

He couldn't move anymore.

"What the—?!"

He screamed in shock as his body seized up. His legs gave in. His arms stopped responding.

Then, slowly...

His entire body began to float—suspended in the air, completely paralyzed.

At the same time, Maria raised her hand toward Dawn ..

And he, too, was ensnared by the same mysterious force.

"What the hell is going on?!"

Daemon struggled violently, but it was no use.

"It's useless," Maria said coldly. "I've already seen your blood."

With her crimson eyes glowing like rubies,

Maria advanced—blood still pouring freely from her wounds.

Blood Bind ...

A terrifying ability that allowed her to control the blood of her enemies,

once she had laid eyes on it.

The technique had strict conditions.

But in Daemon's case—he had already lost too much blood.

He no longer had the strength to resist her.

"This is the end."

Using their own blood against them, Maria immobilized both Daemon and Dawn,

Intending to finish them off swiftly.

Daemon cursed furiously, trying to summon more power ..

But nothing worked.

He could do nothing but watch as the woman who had defeated both him and Dawn prepared to deliver the final blow.

But just as she was about to sever their necks ..

She froze.

A new voice echoed across the battlefield.

"Well, well... what do we have here?"

A young man appeared above the ruined arena, Looking down at them with his usual lazy grin.

"You seem to be struggling, cousin."

"Aegon!"

Daemon shouted.

Maria frowned, narrowing her eyes at the approaching duo ..

Aegon Valerion and Selena Hemsworth.

Right on time, the unexpected reinforcements arrived.

Selena fired her magic without hesitation, forcing Maria to retreat.

Her spell shattered the Blood Bind, freeing both Daemon and Dawn.

"Empyrean Maria, is it?"

"I've heard plenty about you."

Drawing his sword, Aegon stepped forward.

"Let's see what you're really made of."

The battle flipped in an instant.

From a one-sided slaughter ..

To four against one.

By sheer "coincidence," Selena's witch mark had led them straight here.

Maria blinked slowly, taking in her surroundings.

"Is this just bad luck... Or something else entirely?"

It started with Daemon arriving the moment she'd defeated Dawn ...

Then Aegon right after she beat Daemon.

Everyone was being pulled to this exact spot.

Only this one.

Other elite students had witch marks too—

They could have gone anywhere.

But they all came to her.

That's when Maria glanced at Dawn, lying behind them.

A bitter smile crept onto her lips.

"So that's it..."

Who would've thought.

She'd end up against a boy with unnatural luck, Luck that defied the laws of life itself.

The Last Survivor.

No matter what happens—he always survives.

Even if others needed help more...

Everything had been drawn to him.

Now, surrounded by enemies—

Especially Aegon, whose presence she couldn't even read ..

Maria realized her odds were nonexistent.

Clutching her sword ..

She drove the blade straight into her own chest, Right in front of everyone's horrified eyes.

"It was a good fight."

She yanked the blade out, blood gleaming ominously on the edge.

Then raised it skyward...

As a crimson glow exploded from her entire body.

"RUN!!"

Aegon shouted the order just in time.

Everyone turned and bolted ..

His voice slicing through the chaos like lightning.

And the moment he screamed ..

It happened.

A bloody explosion erupted from within Maria, Unleashing a tidal wave of gore in all directions.

A cataclysmic surge that devoured everything in its path.

The battle had ended in a way no one could have predicted ..

With a crimson explosion that painted the field in blood.

Chapter 397: Battles of Life and Death (1)

The entire battlefield shifted the moment Maria drove that slender sword into her own chest.

With a gentle smile on her face, she realized there was no way she could win a fight against four people—especially not with Prince Aegon Valerion among them.

So, she chose to end it.

From within her fragile frame, an overwhelming torrent of blood surged out .. far too much to belong to a single person.

It spread across the battlefield like a ruptured dam, soaking everything and everyone in its path.

Then, without warning, the crimson tide ignited.

At Maria's signal, the blood detonated, red flames engulfing the entire area in a massive explosion.

It was a suicidal strike from the Empyrean who had been completely cornered. Even though she had already defeated Dawn, and then Daemon afterward, the Last Survivor's ability had already done its work.

A mysterious power that defied the world's Five Unbreakable Laws.

Faced with such a power, Maria had no choice—victory was simply out of reach.

Even if she had managed to defeat all four somehow... a fifth or a sixth might have appeared.

Dawn would always receive whatever he needed to survive. It wasn't fair to the others, but it was his fate.

A burden he had to carry until the final breath of his life.

The Blood Blossom Bomb.

That was the name of the technique Maria had unleashed, leveling the entire area, while the others fled to avoid being caught in the blast radius.

But at the very last second, Selena intervened—just in time—casting a thin yet formidable barrier around herself and her allies.

Her magic was swift, and she managed to construct a shield strong enough to repel the wave of blood-fueled destruction.

Standing within the square-shaped barrier, everyone stared at the blood that continued to pour down like a storm.

"Where is all this blood even coming from?!"

Selena shouted in frustration, struggling to hold the barrier intact.

But there was no answer.

Maria and her strange powers remained an enigma.

A few seconds passed. Eventually, the tide of blood calmed and dried across the scorched ground, revealing the battlefield once more.

But Maria was nowhere to be found.

She had vanished from sight.

"She wasn't trying to kill us," Aegon said as he slid his sword into its sheath. "She was carving herself an escape route. Not bad."

On the other side, Daemon Valerion removed his armor, though he kept it wrapped around what remained of his right leg—because that foot was never coming back.

The look of fury on Daemon's face was impossible to miss. No one dared approach him.

Even though he hadn't technically lost, and had been ready to keep fighting, Maria had managed to completely immobilize him and remove him from the battle.

That, to him, was no different from defeat.

He would've died, if not for the prince's and Selena's intervention.

"Damn it!!"

Daemon roared, punching the ground beneath him with burning rage.

They had survived, but the taste it left in his mouth was bitter beyond words.

"Let's move," Aegon said calmly. "We're done here."

He began walking, and the others followed.

"But... where to?" Dawn asked, uncertain.

After realizing that the gate they had pinned their hopes on was nothing but a trap, they were lost again—back to square one.

Only this time, it felt even worse.

Yet Aegon Valerion didn't seem the least bit concerned.

"We'll find the others first," he replied. "This battle won't last much longer... we've already reached the end."

Whether it was the Empire or the Ultras, the hunt was nearly over.

But the outcome was still uncertain.

And so, the four of them set out—on a journey to regroup with the rest of their scattered comrades, each of whom was fighting their own deadly war.

...

...

...

"Haaah..."

Maria's breath came out as red-tinged mist in the cold air.

She walked slowly, one hand pressed to her chest, the other gripping the wall for balance.

Her black coat and once-elegant white outfit were drenched in blood.

"I've gone too far this time..."

Maria's ability made her stronger the more she hurt herself—stronger the more blood she shed.

But in exchange, her wounds took a very long time to heal.

The gash in her hand that she had stabbed multiple times... her bleeding chest...

They remained open as she bled in waves of burning pain.

And yet, Maria's calm expression never faltered. Not even for a moment. It was clear she had grown used to pain—a long time ago.

Once she was far enough from the battlefield, she raised her gaze to the night sky above.

"I wonder if Lord Mergo has completed his mission..."

She spoke softly, pulling a golden pocket watch from her coat.

Time was flowing—slowly, but inevitably.

The end was near.

And everyone could feel it.

Empyrean Maria vs. Dawn Polaris...

Another round ended in the Empire's favor.

...

...

...

While Maria was locked in combat with the others, a far more violent battle erupted elsewhere—one of pure vengeance.

Seris Moonlight unleashed her full might against Baylor Moonlight.

The icy flower tattoos covering her right arm were the same ones that had once appeared in the distant past, when she had lost control.

But this time, Seris wielded her power with complete intent. The marks stopped advancing once they reached her shoulder—limiting the awakening to one arm only.

"This is my current limit..."

After countless days of relentless training, she had barely managed to reach this point.

"The Ice Flower ability burns through aura at an insane rate... but in return, it grants overwhelming power."

Fully aware of this cost, Seris threw everything she had at Baylor Moonlight.

With a flick of her hand, six celestial orbs materialized. But these weren't ordinary orbs.

They were massive spheres—planets, in a sense—infused with the frigid aura of her Ice Flower, each brimming with destructive force.

Serpents hissed around her, conjured by her aura, all lunging at Baylor with wrath.

Seris herself charged in, sword drawn, clad in a crystalline shield of frost.

She was all in.

Every ounce of strength she had forged through pain and training ..she used it in a single goal: to kill this man.

"So that shard of ice has taught you to control your power," Baylor muttered, finally growing serious.
"Even if you're barely able to withstand it."

Suddenly, the six planetary orbs fired icy beams of devastating scale.

Baylor endured them with his body, dodging the serpents and clashing directly with Seris in brutal close-quarters combat.

The tattoos on Seris's arm glowed more intensely with every blow she struck.

"You won't be able to defeat me, Seris. The difference in rank between us is far too great."

With his bare hands, Baylor crushed the white serpents one after another, blocking the orbs' constant bombardment.

"I'll admit it—you're strong. Reaching this level at your age is nothing short of a miracle."

Seris's aura output far exceeded the S rank threshold—something considered impossible for someone of her age.

But her opponent was Baylor.

A towering, insurmountable foe.

"I let my guard down once, which allowed you to land a hit."

BOOOM!

Summoning dozens of his own celestial orbs, Baylor retaliated, overwhelming Seris's frozen planets and nullifying them completely.

"That won't happen again."

With a single punch, he shattered her swords and regained control of the battlefield.

"This struggle is meaningless."

"Shut that damned mouth of yours!"

Seris roared, pushing herself further, summoning every last drop of latent power she could muster.

Even knowing her enemy outclassed her in every way, she refused to back down.

"Do you think you'll continue to escape , no matter what atrocities your hands have committed?!"

The frozen orbs spun faster, launching a relentless barrage of icy projectiles, veiling Baylor's vision entirely.

Seizing the opportunity, Seris pierced his domain and closed the distance.

"The souls of those you killed in the past... one day, they'll coil around your neck to announce your end!"

She slammed her marked hand against his chest—ready to finish it.

Baylor's eyes widened in shock as her aura exploded at point-blank range.

Seris bore the pain, unleashing the most powerful technique she had ever created—her final hope to end the man who had taken so much from her.

"Ice Formation... Supreme art : Inverted Butterfly Wings!!"

The enhanced ice aura erupted in Baylor's face, consuming him in its entirety.

The power surged outward in a blinding storm, and from within it, massive wings of frost bloomed—shaped like the wings of a giant butterfly—encasing Seris at the center.

She had poured everything into that one attack. The strain was so immense, her tattoos began bleeding from her arm.

But it was worth it.

That was a finishing move .. powerful enough to kill even an SS-ranked Awakened.

The mountainous terrain where the battle took place had become a field of frozen death.

Frost mist veiled everything, obscuring vision with a chilling fog.

Seris couldn't tell if her attack had succeeded—but she knew she had reached her limit.

She could barely remain standing in this form.

Her body was breaking.

She had risked it all, hoping this overwhelming attack would be enough to kill Baylor.

But reality had other plans...

Just as she was about to collapse, Baylor, still standing, grabbed her by the wrist—the one etched with tattoos—and gazed at her in a way that sent fresh terror flooding through her.

"Amazing... truly amazing..."

With one hand gripping hers tightly, Baylor touched his chest with the other.

There, a long, bloody wound stretched from his collarbone to his abdomen.

"If your attack had been just a bit stronger... you might have actually killed me."

Chapter 398: Battles of Life and Death (2)

Seris had been smart. She had concealed her trump card until the very last second, unleashing it only after breaching his defense.

But even her strongest ultimate skill hadn't been enough.

"Let's deal with this strange power of yours first."

His voice was grim, his face terrifying. Without hesitation, Baylor tightened his grip on her right arm.

Seconds later, a scream tore through the battlefield ... Seris's scream .. as Baylor ripped her arm off, tearing it from her body in a brutal burst of violence.

She crashed to the ground, blood gushing from the wound without pause.

Baylor...

Held the tattooed arm—now severed and limp—before freezing it solid in one swift motion.

Then, just like shattering glass ...

He crushed it into pieces.

Seris stared up at him with bloodshot, defiant eyes, refusing to give in—even if it meant her death.

Clenching her teeth against the pain radiating from her severed limb, she stood once more with a scream of sheer will, forming ice around the stump.

Her breath came in rasps as she summoned the last dregs of her aura, forging a new arm of ice in its place.

Panting, trembling, Seris tried to fight back again.

Baylor looked at her, genuinely impressed.

"Your determination... it's astounding."

"Shut the fuck up!"

With a roar, Seris conjured a blazing ice flame around her new hand and attempted to launch it ..

But Baylor was faster.

He appeared in front of her in a flash, and blood spilled once more.

With a blade made of his own power, he drove it into her chest without mercy, flipping her world upside down.

"I told you, all your desperate efforts are meaningless. You cannot defeat me."

With calm cruelty, Baylor slowly pulled the blade out, then whispered beside her ear:

"This world remembers only the victors. There is no place for the cries of the defeated."

"The winner writes the rules. The winner decides who is right and who is wrong... who deserves to live, and who must die."

Grabbing her by the throat, Baylor snarled:

"I am the victor, Seris. I am the one who survived! You fought for some ideal—tried to take revenge on me—and where did that bring you? To death!"

"You are the loser, Seris Moonlight. And in this world, there is no place for losers."

Coldly, he began tightening his grip around her neck. Seris writhed in agony.

And it was true.

Just as Baylor said ...

She had lost. And she was about to die.

But at that very moment...

Dawn Polaris had already emerged victorious from his battle with Maria.

Which meant... the "Last Survivor's Blessing" was no longer active.

No longer were fate and probability being pulled toward Dawn.

And that's when he appeared.

A pillar of flame crashed down from the sky like a waterfall of wrath.

Baylor's eyes widened as someone ripped Seris from his grasp.

Icy blue eyes met burning crimson ones.

Phoenix Sunlight held Seris tightly in his right arm—and with his left, he unleashed a searing blast of fire that engulfed Baylor, launching him hundreds of meters away.

"Keep your filthy hands off her."

The impact of Phoenix's fire was monstrous, blasting Baylor like a meteor strike.

Without warning, the young Lord of the Sunlight House took to the skies, carrying Seris in his arms.

When the dazed and wounded girl opened her eyes with difficulty...

She saw herself cradled in his embrace.

She recognized him—but he wasn't the same Phoenix she knew.

His once auburn hair now blazed like wildfire, and glowing red auras burned around his eyes.

His very presence radiated such heat that Seris, despite her freezing constitution, found herself sweating uncontrollably.

"Professor... Phoenix..."

"Don't speak. You're badly hurt."

Flying at full speed, he rushed them both away from the battlefield.

"Let's focus on getting out of here first."

In his ultimate awakened form, Phoenix was like a shooting star .. a burning comet ripping through the sky.

"How did you find me so quickly?" Seris asked, trying to freeze the gaping wound in her chest.

She had been ready to die only moments ago—until Phoenix appeared like a miracle and pulled her back.

His answer came brief, focused on the path ahead.

"I managed to repel one of their Lords... and then I moved right away to search for you. I felt your aura the moment you unleashed your final attack."

With a faint smile, Phoenix praised Seris.

"You've done well to survive this far. Leave the rest to me."

The young Lord of the Sunlight House was incredibly fast.

Even though he'd found himself up against Godfrey, one of the Ultras Lords equal to his level, he had still managed to drive him back—soaring like a blazing comet to rescue his students.

He wasn't considered the greatest talent of his family for nothing.

But that didn't mean the battle was over.

Because just as they began to gain some distance from the battlefield ...

The ground trembled.

A monstrous presence stomped toward them, shaking the earth with each step.

Lord Godfrey had returned—charging with sheer fury, his golden armor shattered, half his face charred black by Phoenix's devastating flames.

Yet even now, he held onto his twin daggers, eyes locked onto the enemy who had humiliated him.

"This bastard... he just won't stay down," Phoenix muttered.

Without hesitation, he turned around—still holding Seris in one arm—and raised his free hand toward the sky.

"This time, I'll finish it properly."

His hand ignited, and within seconds, his flames had engulfed the heavens.

Godfrey, roaring like a beast, leapt into the air, cloaked in a terrifying violet aura.

He was a monster born for war, lacking in intellect but overflowing with killing intent.

Yet Phoenix showed no fear—completely unmoved by the lethal aura crashing toward him.

He wasn't the most experienced. He wasn't even a good leader.

But on the battlefield—he was a true monster.

A warrior who had never lost a single fight in his life.

"Eternal Flame Style: Eternal Blaze – Grand Phoenix Inferno!"

His fire surged and twisted, forming a colossal phoenix wreathed in divine flames.

The phoenix let out a deafening screech, illuminating the night sky before it dove straight toward Godfrey in a blazing fury.

Despite his massive size, Godfrey looked like an insect before that heavenly beast.

And then—without warning—

The fire consumed him.

All of him.

The earth around him, the sky above—everything was scorched in a sea of flame.

Phoenix's fire was so intense, it could melt metal and burn flesh straight off the bone.

Godfrey found himself trapped in that hell, flailing, burning alive .. while Phoenix calmly soared higher, leaving him behind.

He didn't bother watching his enemy writhe.

He had already done what needed to be done.

Still, the flames of the Eternal Blaze raged on, devouring Godfrey over and over again.

No matter how hard he fought, he couldn't escape.

And death drew closer with each second...

Until ...

A wall of ice crashed down from above, smothering the inferno in one clean sweep.

Baylor had arrived—just in time.

Freezing the Eternal Blaze with every ounce of his power, he sighed while watching Phoenix fly off into the distance.

"That damned Phoenix... he's grown far stronger than the last time I saw him."

He wasn't called the brightest prodigy of his generation for nothing.

"Get up, Godfrey. We're not done here."

Expressionless, Baylor began walking toward the direction their enemies had fled, while the scorched and half-burned Godfrey dragged himself behind him.

"They may have escaped for now, but they have nowhere to go. Our armies are already surrounding the region."

Wherever they run, the enemy will always be waiting ahead.

"This isn't over yet."

Chapter 399: Snow Lionheart vs V

The Witch's Game Was Nearing Its End.

Anyone who had witnessed the brutal battles unfolding could sense it.

The Elite Class—after securing victory in many of their individual duels—had gained a bit of breathing room, unaware that a massive army had once been lying in wait.

And it was Frey Starlight alone who held that army at bay .. facing Mergo in a hidden battle no one else even knew had taken place.

But what Frey did was not victory. It was merely a delay ... buying them time.

The thousand soldiers he faced were only the vanguard, the frontlines of just one region.

There were still three other regions, each dispatching an army of equal—or greater—strength.

And they were coming... for him and his friends.

Led by the remaining Ultras and Hollow, these armies crept closer to the center, slowly encircling Frey and the others who had earned only a few precious minutes with their final desperate stand.

Among all the elite students, Frey's closest friends were still locked in battle with their opponents.

And perhaps the fiercest fight of all was the one between Snow Lionheart, the Empire's champion...

...and the masked warrior V, the Ultras' greatest hope.

But this was no battle between heroes.

It was a clash of monsters, raging wildly against one another.

Snow had invoked his War King Form, a state that drove him into a bloodthirsty frenzy.

While V unleashed a transformation of his own—The Berserker Form—a jet-black armor spiraling around him as his eyes turned pure white, hollow and insane.

Their screams shook the earth, echoing alongside the violent clashes between Moonlight Edge and Vermithor.

To withstand V's black flames, Snow was forced to wield every element at his disposal.

Even so, the fight remained barely balanced.

V's fire was unlike anything else—it burned everything, even Aura itself.

Add to that the Moonlight Edge's strange Aura, capable of erasing all other energies...

And V's offensive power became something beyond comprehension.

If not for Snow's War King Form and the Vermithor reinforcing his body, he wouldn't have lasted a second.

He was far stronger than the last time they fought—yet still unable to overcome V.

The very idea infuriated him.

So, with all his might, he began tearing through the flames using his masterful technique.

"The Fourth Sword: The World-Severer!"

Empowered by Stellar Aura, Snow sliced through the dark fire, sending a wave of pure energy that split it in two.

Knowing it wasn't enough, he used the technique again. And again. And again.

Over and over, World-Severer roared through the battlefield, slowly gaining ground against the undying inferno.

But V didn't stand idle.

The moment Snow pushed forward, the masked warrior rushed him, gathering the scattered black flames into a giant flaming skull—its maw opening wide to devour him whole.

"You won't beat me!"

V's offense was monstrous, even if his defense was weak.

But the jet-black armor coiling around him covered that weakness, making him almost impossible to injure.

"Absolute Zero!"

Summoning all his Aura, white fire born from pure frost gathered at the edge of Vermithor.

A massive ice cannon surged forth, colliding with the skull of black fire—both forces swallowing each other whole.

V's flames were stronger, but Snow had bought just enough time to escape the blast using his Void Step.

And then ..

Activating it again, he reappeared beside V, sword blazing with the most powerful form of Stellar Aura.

Their blades clashed.

Again. And again.

Blow after blow, they fought at insane speed, like demons in human skin.

V's attack power was undeniably stronger—but Snow was far faster.

Harnessing his multitude of elements, he fought with a fluid, adaptive style, granting him a freedom his enemies lacked.

And when combined with his overwhelming War King Form, Snow stood as V's equal.

Minutes passed. The two exchanged a torrent of strikes, shattering the earth, tearing through mountains—obliterating everything in their path.

They had reached a stalemate.

No matter how hard they fought, neither could gain the upper hand.

They could only keep attacking until one of them fell.

There were no thoughts in their minds anymore—only instinct.

Their bodies had become machines programmed for one purpose: kill.

To the last breath, to the final heartbeat .. they would fight to the death.

A storm of swords engulfed them.

Their battle had become a war of pure Aura.

Snow's elemental storm and V's abyssal fire collided like natural disasters... earthquakes of power that never ceased.

"I won't lose!"

They both screamed with the same raw fury... again and again.

"I won't lose to him!!"

For both Snow and V...

They were the pinnacle of the lands they came from.

Victory for one meant dominion for an entire continent over another.

And so—defeat was no longer an option.

No matter how brutally they clashed, no matter how much blood they lost...

Neither of them could gain the upper hand.

They were perfectly matched—an even duel that pushed both to their absolute limits, devouring their strength at a dangerous pace.

And both knew it.

The battle was heading toward a dead end.

"Why won't this son of a bitch fall?!"

They thought the same thing at the same time, unleashing even fiercer attacks.

One wielded the Blessing of the Lightbringer, a divine gift that elevated him far above his peers.

The other, a demonic contract with one of the world's most powerful devils, paired with a raw talent that stood at the very peak of all Ultras since their rise.

Monsters like these couldn't be defeated by anything less than monsters of equal caliber.

Minutes passed.

The battlefield turned crimson with their blood, soaking the ground without pause.

Vermithor was filled with divine power—an energy that allowed Snow's body to regenerate after each devastating blow.

V, on the other hand, was accumulating damage, yet the masked warrior never stopped.

At some point, both fighters' vision began to blur. They had unleashed powers that shouldn't exist in beings of their level.

It was clear.

This had to end... Now.

Tapping into the last of his demonic strength, V allowed the dark flames to engulf him completely, transforming him into something no longer human.

Like a dam bursting, black fire erupted outward in a wave of annihilation, swallowing the battlefield and extending for kilometers.

Snow immediately leapt into the sky, fleeing the encroaching inferno.

"You're not going anywhere!!"

With a flick of his hand, V commanded the black fire to rise into the heavens—threatening to consume the sky itself.

Snow looked like an insect in the face of this hellish tide.

Flames that threatened to burn him alive at any second.

But he didn't flinch.

Suspended in the sky, he raised his blade.

Snow roared, fusing all his elements into a singular Aura that shifted in color again and again—until it swelled with terrifying pressure.

Then, with all his might, he swung his sword downward.

"Grand Cosmic Formation!!"

His strongest attack—an explosive wave of nuclear force—descended like a star into the heart of V's black flames.

Two cataclysmic forces collided in the skies, unleashing an apocalyptic blast that rocked the entire region.

And after a long, drawn-out clash, something unbelievable happened.

Both attacks pierced through each other, shattering space and time in their wake.

V's flames struck Snow.

Snow's Grand Cosmic Formation detonated upon V.

There was no more aura left to defend.

No power remaining to resist.

They had no choice but to endure the incoming destruction.

And so, both of them fell.

Crashing violently to the ground, their bodies shattered by the very attacks they had unleashed.

It was a catastrophic end to a battle that had brought nothing but devastation.

Buried beneath the wreckage...

V was the first to move, barely conscious as he threw a shattered scream into the air, gasping for breath.

Agonizing pain wracked his body—Snow's slash had cut clean through him, from shoulder to abdomen, nearly splitting him in two.

He couldn't even stand.

He collapsed instantly, his body writhing in unbearable pain.

The slash wasn't his only wound .. his entire body had collapsed under the might of Grand Cosmic Formation.

Lying face down, V fought the agony with all he had, searching for his opponent.

It took only a few seconds before he found him.

Snow Lionheart was in no better shape.

His body was charred black, his flesh scorched so thoroughly by the dark flames that his face was barely recognizable.

His injuries were immense, enough to leave him unconscious.

What was even more terrifying was that some of V's dark fire had embedded itself into Snow's left arm, still eating away at him from within.

If not for Vermithor struggling to suppress the corruption, Snow would have already been dead.

The black fire didn't stop even after hitting its target—it still burned, crawling slowly toward Snow's motionless body.

With the last flicker of awareness, V manipulated the lingering flames, directing them toward his enemy.

His broken mask finally gave way, revealing a bloodied grin.

Then came the laugh.

V laughed like a madman before finally passing out.

"Burn in hell."

And with that, he collapsed too.

Even to the end, they had remained equals.

But V's crawling fire...

Was about to break the stalemate.

Snow's War King Form had already faded.

He was unconscious.

Defenseless.

And the black flames were about to consume him.

The hero of the Empire was on the verge of death.

But just before the flames could reach him—

A hail of arrows fell from above, bombarding the ground and scattering the black fire, forcing it to shift away.

At the same time, Lara Croft leapt gracefully into the battlefield, rushing straight toward the fallen Snow.

When she reached him, Lara couldn't stop herself from gasping in horror.

Staring down at the scorched, barely recognizable body of Snow Lionheart...

She stood frozen in shock.

The black fire was still crawling across his left arm, trying to consume the rest of his body.

Without hesitation, Lara cut off his arm.

"You'll be okay... you'll be okay... you're not going to die!"

With Snow strapped to her back, she dashed away, weaving through the flames with remarkable agility.

Luckily, she hadn't completely left the battlefield—just far enough to stay clear of their overwhelming attacks. She had watched everything from afar, using her sniper's scope to observe from extreme distances.

She wanted to help.

But in a battle between monsters like V and Snow, her abilities were useless.

"Don't die on me, Snow... please don't die in my arms..."

Her mind had gone completely blank.

Carrying Vermithar in her hands, with Snow on her back...

The only sign of life was the faint pulse she could feel from him. It was the only thing telling her he was still alive.

Once they were far enough from the battlefield ..

Lara stopped the bleeding from his severed arm and placed the sword back onto his chest.

Vermithor's light began healing him instantly, but his condition was horrifying—his face completely charred beyond recognition.

She had never seen anyone survive injuries like that before.

She was terrified.

Trapped in the barren lands of the Ultras...

Vermithor's sacred light was her only hope.

And so, she sat there... helpless... unsure what to do, while Snow writhed in agony beside her.

Snow Lionheart vs. V...

The battle had ended in a draw—one that tasted like defeat for the Empire.

The shockwaves of their clash could be felt kilometers away.

Yet the final round of the Witch's Game... was still far from over.

Chapter 400: Sansa vs Adriana

The Witch's Game would never be complete...

Unless the witch herself took part.

That had always been the unspoken rule.

But it seemed the Witch's battle... was already over.

Hovering in the sky beside the red gate...

Beatrice, inside Adriana's body, let out a sigh of disappointment.

"Sansa Valerion... is that really all you've got?"

Her face showed clear disappointment as she stared down at Sansa.

The girl lay inside a massive crater of destruction, her body broken and drenched in blood.

She had lost—completely.

Adriana had overwhelmed her with a terrifying gap in power.

"I didn't expect you to be this weak. What happened to the strength you once showed me? The terrifying shadows that once struck fear into the fiercest of Nightmare Creatures?"

For years, Beatrice had lived inside the temple, using Adriana's body as a vessel.

In other words, Beatrice had lived among Frey and his companions for nearly two years now.

Among them all, Sansa had always caught her interest—the girl's demonic power was unique.

"Are you holding back because I'm your friend? Kihihhi... You're breaking my tiny little heart."

Adriana laughed loudly as Sansa slowly pushed herself up.

"Shut that damn mouth of yours."

Staring at her battered body and the wounds she had sustained just from exchanging attacks...

Sansa realized that winning this battle was almost impossible.

'If I could still control my power like before... I could have beaten her.'

But that was no longer possible.

The will of the demon seed inside her—the one that once helped her wield that power—was long gone.

Even though Adriana was the weakest of Beatrice's puppets... she was still far too powerful for Sansa now.

Knowing this, the princess gritted her teeth and tried once more to summon her strength.

A massive shadow formed beneath her feet.

"Trying again? Sorry, darling... but your shadows are too weak."

With a wave of her hand...

Adriana summoned dozens of celestial spheres once more, releasing a tremendous pressure that made Sansa flinch instinctively.

"I know I can't fight like that demon did..."

That wild and violent combat style was gone—buried somewhere deep inside her.

"But I'm not a demon. I'm human. So I'll fight like a human!"

Gathering her shadow around her...

The darkness slowly crawled across her body.

Sansa was trying something... something that made Adriana narrow her eyes.

"What are you trying to do?"

Instead of attacking with the shadow ..

Sansa wrapped it around herself.

She focused intensely, trying to recall a memory that had once captivated her.

"This... this is the way I want to fight. Just like her."

Just like the girl who had once wrapped her power around herself, forming a pure white shield of ice.

Now, the shadows tightened around Sansa's body, forming a similar—but darker—armor.

The pressure in the battlefield shifted.

Finally, after pouring everything she had, Sansa reached that form.

Using her power to create armor around herself, she now looked entirely different.

Unlike Seris's ninja-like form, Sansa's was something else entirely.

The jet-black armor clung to her body, forming a pair of wings and a crown of horns rising above her head and dark hair.

She looked exactly like...

"Demon."

Adriana burst out laughing as she watched the dramatic transformation unfold before her eyes.

"You said you'd fight like a human, yet now you take on a form that resembles a demon... What a delicious contradiction."

Ignoring her laughter ..

Sansa stomped the ground with force and shot toward her opponent.

She was eager to test her new power as soon as possible.

Adriana immediately bombarded her with dozens of flaming projectiles using her celestial spheres—but Sansa deflected them effortlessly, her wings wrapping around her in defense.

Then, reaching out her hand toward Adriana ..

Within seconds, a massive shadowy hand formed and lunged forward, trying to consume the witch entirely.

But the giant hand came to a sudden halt as it slammed into a thin barrier that had manifested just in time. Adriana twirled her staff with a grin.

"Crush her for me."

Responding to her command ..

A giant foot materialized in the sky and came crashing down on Sansa's head, aiming to flatten her into the earth.

But Sansa, acting on pure instinct, conjured dozens of black tendrils that shot out from her back like magic.

The tendrils instantly wrapped around the descending foot, halting it completely.

And like serpents, they slithered upward, coiling tighter until the entire construct exploded into pieces.

Without pause, Sansa redirected the tendrils to attack Adriana.

But as they closed in ..

Adriana began teleporting, vanishing and reappearing each time just before impact, effortlessly dodging the attacks as she flew through the air, laughing all the while.

"How wonderful! Your strength has grown so much!"

She continued to taunt and toy with Sansa, who said nothing in return.

The princess pursued her relentlessly, determined to end the fight as fast as possible—especially as she began to feel something odd: the shadows building up inside her body, giving her an unsettling feeling she couldn't ignore.

"Kill her for me."

With a flick of her wrist ..

Reality twisted once again around Adriana.

In a surreal shift, dozens of magical cannons and firearms manifested out of nowhere.

Hundreds of them.

All aimed directly at Sansa, surrounding her completely.

And without warning...

They opened fire in unison, unleashing a relentless barrage.

Sansa had no choice but to wrap her wings tightly around herself, bracing for impact.

Adriana, on the other hand, was clearly enjoying herself.

"Even after boosting your power like this, the gap between us is still immense, dear Sansa."

Trapped in a hellish storm of gunfire ..

Sansa was at the mercy of the witch, who was merely playing with her.

"At this rate, you really will die here."

With another motion of her hand, swords and spears materialized alongside the firearms, pointing at Sansa from all directions.

"Let's end this game before it gets boring."

With that playful grin on her face, Beatrice, from within Adriana's body, prepared to bring the battle to its conclusion.

Sansa Valerion vs. Adriana...

The battle was about to enter its final stage.